

*Eros in Poetry
and Prose: Book Four*



by
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Eros in Poetry and Prose

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Cover: The Perfect Picture {see the story by the same name}

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*Ah well, I could not stop her
nor would I want to. For I
knew what it was, and let it be.*

The Eros in Poetry and Prose Series

Eros in literature is one of the finest and most sublime way to share one's love.

The purpose of the *Eros in Poetry and Prose* Series is to share some of the most amorous and enticing pieces of poetry and prose to be found in the English Language. This is the fourth book in the series. Its release coincides with Valentine's Day 2018.

In this edition you will find 40 original poems and 10 pieces of prose from 2017 and early 2018 written by the author, all meant to tickle your fancy ...

In this edition I include the story *Gabriel's Oboe* which is a based on a real life experience ... there is also a poem that goes with the prose. See if you can find it!

Enjoy!

Patrick Bruskiewich

Vancouver, BC, Canada

POETRY

A is for Adolescent Angst

A is for adolescent ... Angst

B is for bawdy ... biology

C is for constant ... conflict

D is for damn ... dumb

E is for endless ... ennui

F is for fuddle ... duddle ... (I thought you said that!)

G is for gee ... Go to

H is for Hell (after you ...)

I is for innocent ...indeed!

J is for Juliette ... my sweet Juliette ...

K is for knot ... knowing ...

L is for love ... or is it lust?

M is for mummm ... munchies

N is for naughty ... neophyte ...

O is for Ohhh organelles ...

P is for psst ...you know what

Q is for ... quiff ...

R is for Romeo ... Romeo ... where is my Romero?

S is for Wee ... Willie ... Shakespeare

T is for torture ... torment

U is for ... you know ... that strong muscle ...

V is for ... that place south of Regina

W is for wild ... Wild ... WILD

X is for sex ... rated ...

Y is for why ... why not ...

Z is for zy ... zy ... zygote ...

Yo, William!

It's a new world of words for me
Big words, strange words, words that
are old English. A great while ago
the world began, oh can't we bury it away

{Refrain :} Yo, William!

But when I was a wee tiny lad,
I spelt them so, and was told
hey ho ... and a hey nonino ...
go spell them all over again!

{Refrain :} Yo, William!

The poems, the prose, the plays
ancient grudges! How now ... Spirit!
... wither wander you? The witless
Wit wonders over hill over dale ...
all the way to hell!

{Refrain :} Yo, William!

But those words they eclipse, the ancient
worlds of Egypt, of Rome, of Jerusalem ...
art a joke! A play .. a play ... My kingdom
for a play, by the bawdy bard!

{Refrain :} Yo, William!

A Merchant, a shrew, star-crossed lovers
such whore-able things ... what's the Puc?
hey ho ...the wind and the rain,
Let's play and shake our speares

{Refrain :} Yo, William!

I may be only fifteen, and still
growing up but learn me the words
And teach me their meaning,
give me great cur age, want wit

{Refrain :} Yo, William!

Come come King Lear, even
We fools know that he that
Has a house to put his head in
has a good head-piece!

{Refrain :} Yo, William!

When that I was a wee tiny boy
With hey ho, ... the wind and the rain;
A foolish thing was but a toy,
But now I'm growing up ,, hey ho

{Refrain :} Yo, William!

And therefore take the present time
With a hey, ho, and a hey nonino
For love is crowned with the prime
In the spring time the only pretty ring time

{Refrain :} Yo, William!

When birds do sing, hey ding a ding, ding;
Sweet lovers like the spring. With a
Hey ho the wind and the rain
Let us play Shakespeare again.

{Refrain :} Yo, William!

What Brings Boys Joy

The boys
They love their toys ...

Like the girls

Love their pearls.

Sugar and Spice

And all things nice

Nah ... Not the Boys

What brings them joy

Are their sticks!

Content to Know We Once Loved

At the end of this day,

as darkness starts to fall

What am I to say ...

for it's loneliness that calls.

My love – she has gone.

She has been plucked from me,

and I am left here all alone

sad and foregone, as you can see.

Me, a kind and gentle man

was not vile enough for her.

So she sought all she can

and stole away with a wretched cur.

I and she fit hand to glove ...
they like hand and whip.
Ours was the sanctity of love,
There's the sharpness of the tips!

Oh, I remember my darling's face,
her lovely eyes and red full lips.
How when we met she was such grace,
her happiness seemed her step.

She'd let me string her bodice tight
... go we to company and the dance,
then free her at the end of night,
to consummate our sweet romance.

For many months we loved like this
We slept together in such bliss
Then I one day awoke to find
My bed was empty – she was gone!

The night before a man she found
had taken such a fancy to her
This morn she'd gone to ground
... that damned is such a cur!

He had his way with her

and with such force ... her pains
became her pleasures, lured
away he was by his disdain.

For all things good and nice
Her pleasures and her pains replete
In mortal sin she paid her price
No longer was she so new and sweet.

The devil, so cruel was he
he robbed her of her blessed soul.
Happy could she no longer be,
her blood ... it ran so cold.

Then she saw him for what
he was, and late one night
at my door she reappeared, hat
in hand ... they'd had a fight.

No longer was she that pretty
thing that I once knew, he led
her to her ruin – now she's petty,
her escape from real life her bed.

But now she is the one
to sleep alone – for it is I
who packed his bags, is gone

I must flee ... erst I die.

The memory – how lost her
loveliness is, is what I see
When my eyes close. Here,
Alone ... please leave me be.

Content to know we once
loved, but now love no more.
It has now been many months
since the closing of that door.

And what of my broken heart?
Make it amends? Perhaps with time.
but it's best we stay apart
... her loneliness fits her crime.

Oh Brother! Watch Out for the Pink Ones

The baby butterfly was confused.
Where is my father she asked.
He is in heaven, dear ... her mother said.

Female Butterfly eat their mate
after they copulate and procreate
It's what their babies are made of

But you will not hear that
told by their fathers.

Oh Brother! Do stay away
from fluttering butterflies.

Especially the pink ones ...

She's Just Along For The Ride

She has never known real pleasure,
only pain which she believes is
happiness. What is her treasure?
A stable of ruck buddies, her herd
of large maliciousness, that
ride her when she feels the urge
to take whip in hand, to don her riding hat,
and buck them, or stroke their fur.
But honestly ... what tickles her fancy?

... After all giddy girls on horses ride their
... sex rubbing them hot against the saddles –
...is the stallion rucking the mare here,
... or the mare backing into the stallion?

She might be stoned, or even sober
It makes no difference. Her panties
drop with the mere grop
of their muzzles. She's an addict,
she loves the ride but won't admit it.
The stallions buck her around their paddocks
they dance and prance. She thinks she's fit
riding them. They're just fucking her
... And how do we know?
It's a roll in the hay. It's their feast.
She's never been to the '*Big-O*'
Ranch with the plodding beasts.

Clip, klop, clip, klop, clip, klop
She's just there for the ride.

It is I Who Flips the Silver

He was taught when
an angel visits you
your duty is to obey, then
you might grasp what's true
about the world! The trouble is
there is no way to discern bad
from good, you might miss
the tell-tale, the cyphers, the sad

indifference ... heaven from hell ...
then where would you be,
- in that middle place?

Oh tell
me I have not erred. See
if I can stroke their feathered wings,
... but the devil and the dove do
sport them both. They both sing
a familiar song, ... one sweet
the other less so.

They're two
sides of the same coin,
and it is I who flips the silver.

Whilst Absinthe Makes the Heart Grow Fonder

Vincent ... my stars shine bright
They simmer like diamonds of sand
Oh draw you in, come let me laugh
Away the moon and azure land

A light that in our darkness rise,
in sordid public house, where one can set
to one's own ruin ... go mad ... commit a crime
growl gruff, hallucinate ... ere nightmare get

Partake, I must this verdant sin
not once ... not twice ... not in between
let loose the dogs, yes lure me in
then ask me not where I have been.

Lie here, I must, against the spin
how else can I redeem my soul?
Pray catch the chaos that is within
and fortify my heart against the cold.

A sun here burns within my soul
Whilst absinthe makes the heart grow fonder
Why! No one ever comes to harm, old
Selves that burden us to blindly wonder.

Is there a God that truly knows
What we want better than ourselves?
Who helps us where we dare not go
And paint away unhappy lives?

This I say to you ...

Remember when I am gone
And colour not my story
Whilst in life I was a soul foregone
In death, sun's flowers are my glory

Her Beauty is so Real and Kind

It was her smile, that lovely smile
that softened my heart. It chipped away
the hardened cast, that had trapped awhile
that which had been shattered to pieces. Say
a word or two of simple grace, continue on
– for more words need be said. Her grace
is far from simple. Then on me it dawns
that the heart is that hidden place
where the great softness of us sits – blind
to those vulnerabilities that give us fright.
But her beauty is so real and kind
her love doth be this mistress' delight!

Pray tell, let me bow, let me love your sure
For I know her beauty shall endure.

You Don't Remember Do You?

Please forgive me.
I have forgotten
your name, but
not the fullness
of your breasts,

where we had
met ... but not
the wetness of you.

But then again
you don't remember
do you ...
You don't
remember my name
just the thrust
of our last
encounter.

Your smile says it all.

In His Dreams He Was Loved

The night came and he slept
alone, like he always did.

He slept as one, himself.
He had forgotten what
pleasure meant, the warmth
of touch, the happiness. His
missed fortune weighed heavily
upon his heart. He would

rather dream than be awake.

In his dreams he was loved –
he was not alone.

The night came and he slept
alone and dreamed,
as he always did.

The Likes of You

Roses are red
and tulips are blue,
these flowers are pretty
but not as pretty as you.

These flowers are soft,
but not as soft as you are.
Their petals do not draw
my heart as yours do.

Roses and tulips are sweet
but not as pleasing as you
when you are exultant –
your splendour is unequalled.

Roses and tulips – they
pale in their beauty
when set besides
the likes of you.

Dans Le Jardin des Etoiles

A child looks up into the starry night.
A boy sees warriors with arms bare
A girl sees goddesses with flowing hair.
They do not see what adults might.
Nor what makes these stars shine bright.
Only twinkle, twinkle, little friend, how
Beautiful you are – bar none. Only now
Perhaps with time they'll see the light.
They'll cease to be so silly – sadly
Dans le jardin des etoiles,
times passes fast.

Her Beauty Shall Endure

It was her smile, that lovely smile
that softened my heart. It chipped away
the hardened cast, that had trapped a while
that which had been broken into pieces. Say

a word or two of simple grace, continue on
– for more need be said. Her grace
is far from simple. Then on me it dawns
that the heart is that hidden place
where the great softness of us sits – blind
to those vulnerabilities that give us fright.
But her beauty is so real and kind
her love doth be this mistress' delight.
Pray tell, let me bow. Let me love you sure
for I know her beauty shall endure.

The Poetess

The poetess enjoyed her freedom
She could write where and when
ever she wanted. It was her fancy.

She smiled whenever she recited
her poetry in public, for her words
quickened her in their remembrance.

She remembered the moments
of ecstasy as she stroked and
petting the keys of her machine.

Her words flowed freely then,

and only then when she was
free to tickle her fancies.

I Have Lived For Art

I have lived for art.
I have lived for love.
They are nere apart.
But do I get enough
of either in a day?
Yes, if that day is full
of happiness and play.
Then I need not mull
as to whether I have
done all I can. It's
in the evidence of kind,
that my life be fully mine.

To Feel the Heat and Touch the Heart

I spend another night alone
in dreams of that other place,
where only peace and happiness grows
where bows, and belles, and pink lace
dance amidst the headiness of time,

where light is light, and joy is joy,
where being blissful is not a crime,
where one's heart is not a toy
and visages light the surreal day.
So ask me not, why then do I
return to that which is the real – I pray
one day, to stay among the bows,
the belles, the pink, the lace
to feel the heat, and touch the heart
of one who will never want to be apart

In the Middle of the Night

In the middle of the night
when all are asleep but I
what keeps me awake is fright,
that inescapable fear that I may die
before I wake. The clock strikes three
It is fatigue that catches me, and will
with certainty soon set me free
of that what binds me still
to my life, and how I am to be.
Then I drift to bless'd dream
that blissful state of willful being
without a care at all it seems,
with clos'd eyes and open'd mind

Seeing that fright is not death, but life.
Awake me nought for I slumber still.

Unwrap Me and Savour the Sweetness of Life

It was the touch electric, her
hand upon mine. I looked
up to see two shining eyes, sure
of herself, she smiled. This took
me by surprise, for I knew she
liked me, but how much, now
I knew it was more like love, be
may what it comes, now how
could there be any doubt, here
was someone who wanted to
unwrap me, and savour
the sweetness of life in its
fullness, so I smiled back.
Ah well, I could not stop her
nor would I want to. For I
knew what it was, and let it be.

If They Love Their Flowers

What flowers do when we aren't

watching – am I old enough to know?
They have male and female parts
so close together as they grow ...
the stamen, the carpel, soft petals,
filaments, anthers and pollen
– sperm by any other name – that settles
on everything, drawing us all, and calling
the bees, with their stingers, out to play
in the middle of spring and summer days.
When we give a flower to a pretty girl,
if they love their flowers,
we too set the world
into male and female parts.

Something Pink and Flower Like

I try to imagine
how she might look.
How her petals might
curl like something
pink and flower like.
How she is plentiful
and would put Andromeda
to shame. The summer
is young – the sun
it has begun to shine.

The days are bright
They might get hotter
still. The dew might
flow and fill the air
with that indescribable
perfume that draws
us to savour the softness
of something that is
pink and flower like
Oh how the tulips
Blossom.

She For Her Art, And Me For Her

We made love –
she with her f-stop
and me with my body,
caressed by the camera
angles and apertures.
She was an artist,
and I her model and muse.
Hot blood rushed
through our bodies
and love, she for her art,
and me for her as well.

We Are All Fortune's Fools

This voice that quickens and strains,
battles against the howling wind, against the onset
of all that ails, and all that pains.
This stolen season, of beauty and of youth begets
but disappointment – time marches on –
for all, be they kings or paupers, queens or concubines,
Death is not a battle that can be won
by such a thing as us. How can we find
solace in the fragility of our soul?
That which helps us sleep, all that makes us grave
is also that that which makes us bold.
Our hearts it beats away the hours and the days.
It holds all ecstasy and all strains, until
one day this voice, it too speaks no more.
We are all fortune's fools!

It Fits Your Fancy

If you want it –
grab it. It's there
for you. It fits
your fancy, for where

else could it be
so bare? It's art
n'est ce pas? See
it knows – this part
that set's the mood,
the model, the muse,
is for you. Soon
the moment will lose
its magic – then what?

The Kind, The Gentle , The Soft

Only in my dreams
does she live in my life.
The realness of it – seems
that she is my wife.
The kind, the gentle, the soft,
the mother of my children, and
someone who does lift
me up every time I stumble.
She smiles and lights up
our world. Her breasts
sustains our children, and I.
No life is in the balance –
she doesn't storm barricades.
She is happy in her own life –

sadly she is not in mine.

Splendour Conceals Itself

Shut my eyes and count down from ten.

Ten – we are together, all alone, she and I

Nine – I open my eyes, she leans forward

Eight – I kiss her, she kisses me in back

Seven – we are in a passionate embrace

Six – I am struggling with her buttons, she mine

Five – her clasp pops open, splendour reveals itself

Four – our body warmth heats the room

Three – my shirt, pants and are all, she grabs me

Two – next her blouse, skirt and panties, I grab her

One – flesh on flesh, she snatches me up

Eros – oh, oh, oh, splendour conceals itself.

The Day I Became a Man

With a swing of his hips

Patrick began to strip

To tremendous applause

he took off his drawers ...

And began his gig
to classical music it was
Gabriel's Oboe, from wig
to wigeon, Yo Yo Ma

Cello! They had never
seen such a thing!
It sent them into fever
The Artist Model

A swing from love to lust – wow!
They loved it – right down
to the red feather, slow
deliberate and now ...

I let the feather drop ...
There's not a dry
pair of panties in the flop
the boys are hard too!

Try to top that!
They can't ... I win
The hearts of everyone
in the place – Burlesque!

This was the Day I became a man ;P

What Am I Doing Wrong?

It's Saturday night and I'm home alone,
Fine wine, deluxe pizza, and an action flick.
It's Thunderball – James Bond.
I've no place to park my prick.
I should be out and enjoying life
to its fullest, chasing skirts, flirting,
making babies, but I am not. What strife,
my loneliness, it's really hard and hurting
me. I'm tipsy and my bottle's empty. The film's all
but over. And it is not yet nine. What am
I doing wrong? Other men are getting more
out of life – their cats meow ... Damn
maybe it is because I am a bore,
maybe I don't know how to stroke
the cat's fur – my pussies don't purr. This
cat's not even on the prowl – growl.

What is a Man to Do?

She wore her dress
Like a seraphim
Dresses the moon –
Velvet soft and stylish too.

What is a man to do
But wonder how perfection
Is so natural to her air
As an angel's loving fair.

And the Wind Carried Her Words

The words she shared
wrote happiness in the air.
A poetess at heart,
she wrote of love
in her own way
and in her own words

And the wind carried
her words across the night,
across the water too,
and the moon smiled
at her loveliness.

Between Two Who Love

EROS – her name

arouses that which

only softness and
intimacy can bring
between two who love,
who know each other's
inner parts, their hearts,
their hopes, their dreams,
their loneliness too, and
know to kiss and hold
each other closer still.

I'm Heming My Way Through Life

Yes, I am a lush
The bottles lined up
Next to my door
Tells you so, but I
Am a good lush.

I giggle when I drink,
The wine helps me when I think.
My written words flow – a bottle of wine
Lets me feel oh so very fine.

I cut out the patterns of ideas
And stitch together my thoughts
And I'm earnest in my words too

I'm heming my way through life.

On The Sixth Day at the Sixth Hour

God made women's breasts

To make us men envious ...

For nothing is so soft
nor so mystically magical,
nothing shaped so perfectly
as those proud reminders
that we all come from
a divine place
and are gifts from God.

Women's breasts were created
on the sixth day at the
sixth hour – and afterwards
God stopped to ponder – she
had won an award for
the creation of woman,
and their beautiful breasts.

Oh Please Do!

Two lips,
soft and inviting
as velvet as
a rose is soft
and beautiful

I kissed her
and she said
oh kiss me again
... oh please do!

And so I did
and she smiled
warm inside ...
velvety warm.

Can You Guess?

Why are you looking at me like that?
Have you never seen a penis before?

No ... May I?

Be gentle ... don't pull. Ummm

What a boy toy! Why are you looking at me like that?

You're so hidden away.

Here give me your hand

What ... is that?

Have you never touched a girl before?

No ...

It's a girl toy ...

May I?

Be gentle ... don't pinch. Ummm

And what are these?

Breasts, gentle ... they're my boys ...

Oh ... my god, they are so soft!

You don't have them, 'cause boys don't make babies.

... but girls do! And what's this?

Can you guess?

Its smiling at me ...

It's my vagina. This is where babies come from ...

may I touch?

ee i'm

It's as soft ... as soft ... as pink velvet.

... cc coming.

Wow!

It is the Pleasure of it, N'est ce Pas?

When you take things in hand

It is for the pleasure of it

N'est ce pas? It's not just

To paw away the time,

Or plow a furrow, or

Rack away the afternoon?

Is it because you are bored

And I am close at hand?
Do you love me, or am
I just a thing to play with –
Something whose fancies you tickle,
because you are who you are?

It is the pleasure of it, n'est ce pas?

Of Things to Come

The radio is playing our song
A slow adagio we once danced to by Barber

Maybe it was a premonition
of things to come.

You use to weep to the music –
now I understand why

The Ballerina in Pink

I watched her dance on stage
the ballerina in pink.
She was so magical.

I had to close my eyes
to imagine she was a real
woman and not some angel.

To imagine she lived no different
than someone who sleeps and
dreams of a better life

than the one she dances to
every night before the beastly crowd.

But Now It is the Number I Love Most

I love the number sixty-nine

You can flip it downside up
and it still feels fine

It's an odd number!
It's not divisible by two,
but is divisible by three

And strangely so, when I was
young I did not care at all for it

but now it is the number I love most

A Toy to Her Cause

She bent down on him so hard
she bent him out of shape.
He tried to push them apart
but she would not have it – rape!

She was hell bent to have her way
with him. She had chased after him
until he was exhausted – she had her say
and began to take him apart, limb by limb.

It was not even pleasant. It was all forced!
Her pleasure came first, of him she cared
not – he was just a toy to her cause
Under her, he was all spent and scared

But she pressed on, a mountain atop him,
An erupting volcano, Vesuvius
Finally she popped ...
he was covered in her ash.

PROSE

Gabriel's Oboe

I admit that I am romantic at heart. My friends tell me I am not of this time and place and that I should have lived in Florence during the Renaissance. Some of my women friends say that I am a Venus with a ... well, you can figure it out.

Ever since I was perhaps five or six, the art of the Renaissance has played an important part in my life. That was when my mother let me try to read an adult book about Leonardo da Vinci, drawings and all. It was the first time I saw his Vitruvian Man and his other drawings of things graceful, beautiful and virtuous. That was also when I heard the name of Dante Alighieri for the first time.

Dante Alighieri, the famous 13th century Italian poet and author of *The Divine Comedy*, understood what beauty meant in both the aethereal and real sense. When he was young and impressionable, perhaps just a bit older than I was when I was introduced to the Renaissance, before even his voice and testicles had dropped, he fell madly in love with a real girl his age, who became the Beatrice *reale* in his day to day life.

During her short life, his adoration for the beautiful maiden, Beatrice Portinari, was a distant, unattainable and unrequited love that he had for her when she was still alive. The living Beatrice had made quite an impression on the young Dante, even though he had only met her twice, and briefly, in a public way during nine years, while she was chaperoned by her handmaidens. It is written in the history of the times that Beatrice had red

hair, and green eyes and a face as pure and as soft as the finest silk. Her bosom was healthy and her deportment heavenly. She was the epitome of Renaissance virtue and Florentine dignity. When Beatrice Portinari died at the tender age of twenty-four Dante's tender and fragile heart was shattered into a thousand pieces.

Dante was a kind and compassionate man, and in living and lasting homage to his Beatrice *reale*, he expressed a timeless and aethereal love for her in his poetry. Was it best for him to have loved and lost? Beatrice's poetic legacy says yes!

Dante suffered a great deal during his lifetime. Despite his hardship, he was a stubborn and strong spirit. What didn't kill him definitely made him a better person, not stronger in the forceful sense, but better as a man and as a poet. Better as someone who understand grace, truth and virtue.

Dante was brutally treated during his lifetime by Italian mobsters who dominated the politics in his beloved Florence. A *mobster*, in an evocative sense of the word, are those ruffians who stir the mob for personal gain or personal pleasure. Some mobsters do their stirring to fill their coffers with gold and some stir the mob just because they can elicit emotion and violence.

Dante could elicit emotion, but was not a violent man, nor did he sit comfortable with violence done by others around him. He spoke out. He spoke his mind. As he did this he made few friends, as he made many enemies. Courage and lawfulness was lacking at the time. As a result Dante

was forced to live in exile from his home, his family and friends, and the city he loved so dearly.

Soon after his death, now the most famous Italian of his age, the Fathers of Florence, some of whom were the very mobsters that made his life hell, fought for the return of his earthy remains to the city that had exiled him. His bones still remain where they were buried elsewhere in Italy.

Some of you might know that Dante is the father of the term *poetic justice*, for while all of Italy even today can call him their own nearly a millennium after his life, the small part of Italy, the City of Florence, cannot. And, to wit, no one today remembers the name of the men who exiled him from his beloved home. What drove him into exile made Dante immortal ...

On and off for the past four decades I have tried to read and understand his *The Divine Comedy*. It is not an easy read, even for someone who enjoys reading. Dante's epic poem divides the aethereal universe into thirds; *Inferno* (Hell), *Purgatorio* (Purgatory) and *Paradiso* (Paradise). Beyond his poetry, Dante also understood that the real world is divided in a similar way. Life on earth is most times a living *Purgatorio*, and very rarely a living *Paradiso*.

I freely admit that I have lived in a Purgatory on earth and like Dante what has not killed me has made me a better person. I seriously hurt my neck and back when I was all of twenty years old while serving at sea as the youngest naval officer in the Royal Canadian Navy. I live in chronic and debilitating pain. I cracked the cervical vertebrae C2/C3 and should have died. If I had

broken C2 it would have been killed instantly. If I had broken C3 it would have paralyzed me.

In an ironic twist my spine at C2/C3 had already been damaged as I came into the world when the obstetric doctor pulled too hard on my fragile and ductile spine. After my arduous entrance into the world, I could not lift my head from my baby's pillow for many weeks afterwards. It took patient and tender physiotherapy so that I could lift my head to my mother's breasts. If two wrongs could make a right this is an example.

I also put C2 to C7 in my spine out of permanent alignment, to the great surprise of more than one X-ray technician. My spine is rather damaged and I suffer from a myriad of physical problems that include heart arrhythmia due to the cardiac nerve occasionally being pinched. The pain I suffer through moment by moment is my crucifixion. I am catholic and believe that if God wants to take me he is welcome to for I do not fear death – I fear debilitation and the inability to be free to walk and talk and do the many things I enjoy doing.

How have I managed to survive? Being a physicist I know I am an organic machine made out of organic materials. The pain I do not treat by artificial means, like drugs or alcohol, but by real and personal means. I know from experience that the only thing that can overcome pain is pleasure and I find pleasure in everything I do. The endorphins that our bodies produce, the endogenous morphine, is wonderful. I will admit that from time to time when pleasure is not enough to overpower my pain and suffering then I

enjoy a sip of Pernod, or God forbid, Absinthe. Then I sleep, perchance to dream, and dream I do.

I will also admit that I have from time to time been to the Gates of Heaven and Paradise. But I have never been to the Gates of Hell and have no idea what they even look like, except in their rendering by Rodin.

Saint Peter knows who I am. I have stood before him several times in the past four decades and he has sent me back to earth saying there are still things that I need to do, not to pass through the gates of heaven mind you, but to alleviate the pain and suffering that others suffer. When I die my last thought will be, have I earned my place in heaven? Saint Peter has shown me tough love for he knows I have already earned a place in heaven, but there is still living that I should do first. Once the big sleep is upon us there is no more mortal pleasure to be had. He knows that I do like mortal pleasure.

Recently I stood at the gates of an earthly Paradise. I was serenaded by the aethereal music Gabriel's Oboe, the theme from the 1980's film *The Mission*, in its rendition by Yo Yo Ma as I performed a burlesque routine at a local competition and won the \$ 500 first prize. For a brief and remarkable evening I was Gabriel baring a message from God and my instrument was there for everyone to enjoy.

Why did I do this? Well, the reason is simple. I have two friends here in Vancouver, who are poor and struggling artists, who just had a baby boy. The two month old boy was born premature and has some health issues. The

parents are stressed out. They are proud and have refused the offer of money from their friends.

When I was born my parents were very, very poor, and they did not have two nickels to rub together. I came into the world premature and had health problems. It was a miracle I survived the first few days. Some family friends helped my parents out. I feel I owe it to God to carry this kindness forward. So I helped my poor artist friends out. There for the Grace of God go I.

And so, I made my artist friends an offer they couldn't refuse. I won the first prize at the burlesque contest on the last Friday of January 2017 and the following day I gave the new mother the prize envelope with the \$ 500 unopened. The two month old baby boy's mother was very happy and gave me a big hug.

From time to time I sit as an artist's model for my artist friends. I have done this for half my life. Despite the damage to my neck and spine, God has been kind and munificent to me. Some of the artists I have sat for say that I am like Michelangelo's David.

For added measure that Saturday evening I sat as an artist model *gratis* for three hours for several art students in the studio of my artist friends that evening so that the father of the new born could earn \$ 100 for teaching a life drawing class. As if to tease me the mother of the two month old, sitting comfortably in a chair in the studio, proceeded to nurse her son while facing me from across the room. As she spoke her voice was lovely and musical. I

swore she had a halo around her head and I was standing in an earthly paradise.

It is important not to appear too immodest when you stand as an artist model and it took a great effort on my part not to appear immodest. I had to stare long and hard at a painting on the wall to take myself out of my body and somewhere else in my consciousness. The mother of the little baby knew what she was doing and the effect that it was having on me. She was expressing a nursing mother's prerogative and enjoying every moment of it.

Despite the January coldness of the studio, while she sat there I was warm all over. It was the endorphins. When she left, the room became wintry again and I shivered. But how much of my tremor was due to the coldness, and how much of that was the aftermath of a pleasurable paroxysm, I do not know. Some parts of me were warmer than other parts. The endorphins were flowing through my body. I was very happy.

The previous evening, the evening of the competition, I had felt a similar pleasurable feeling among the happiness of the burlesque crowd. It was the first time I had done anything remotely like this, performing a risqué routine before complete strangers. This was nothing like standing fully clothes in front of strangers at a high school play. It was lovely. I was in an earthly Paradise.

My burlesque routine was called *The Artist Model*. All I did that evening is perform in full view of several hundred strangers my usual routine of getting ready and sitting as a figurative model. The whole routine lasted a little

under six minutes, with a mere 15 seconds of immodesty at the end. For the final minute I had a strategically placed red feather, which at their prompting during the last fifteen seconds of my performance I let flutter to the ground.

Then I picked the red feather up kneeled down and kissed the cheeks of a lovely young lady next to the stage and then made her night by giving her my prized red feather. After the fact I regretted giving my prized red feather away for little red boas are rather difficult to find. But no matter, it is now her cherished red feather.

The audience of this type of evening had never seen anything like this. They were a Pilsner crowd, not a Pernod one. Classical music, a middle-aged man with salt and pepper grey hair and a beard who looked like Henri Matisse, and an audacity to elicit from them an appreciation of artistic beauty that they did not, in the least, expect.

Besides, when I was young my grandmother taught me you should never judge a book by its covers. On the outside I am just run of the mill man but when you open the covers I am quite a book when it comes to being an Artist's Model. They found that out that evening. There before them walked Michelangelo's David.

After my routine, all the rest of the evening I garnered hugs and kisses from so many women I stopped counting at thirty. One of the women whispered in my ear that after my routine there wasn't a dry pair of panties in the whole place. The room was full of pheromones. There were a handful of frowns, but they were from the tribling crowd.

Towards the end of the night a few of the more daring men were so inspired by my courage that they went up and did their own impromptus, all on the spirit of the evening. The moon and Monty were both full that the evening. Several other men said “I nailed it.” From them I knew they could see themselves up on stage being admired in the same way.

At one in the morning, when it came time to vote for the prize, when my routine came up, the last in the queue, the crowd went wild. The applause was so loud it ripped the tar off the roof of the building and knocked bricks off the sides as well. There were women pounding the stage with approval. It was tribal, it was scary and it wonderful, all at the same time! I could see in the eyes of more than one woman that they wanted me as their boy toy that night. If I had wanted to I could have slept rather intimately. But, ironically, I am a private man, even though my privates had for a brief fifteen seconds in full view of the crowd at the end of my routine. As I left one of the organizers of the event said they had never seen such applause nor felt such love. I have never before seen such *joie de vivre* at any function I have attended in Vancouver. I didn't get home until 3 am.

Oh what a beautiful morning ... oh what a beautiful day! To win a prize of \$ 500 for six minutes of burlesque comes out to \$ 5,000 an hour! Maybe this is telling me that I am in the wrong business. Maybe I should quit my day job ... and take up burlesque. To boot the organizers have asked me back for the next event.

It was at the Gates of this Earthly Paradise that I first laid eyes on and met Beatrice (not her real name, although her real name does rhyme with Beatrice). She came to me to talk near the end of the evening. She had kind, wonderful green eyes, and red hair and an interest in Philosophy. Her eyes, the window to her soul, sparkled as we spoke, even in the dark confines of where we first met, a pub at one of the old hotels on the East side of Vancouver. Yes, and she was a bit tipsy.

This was the time for firsts. This was the first time I performed Burlesque, the first time I won a prize for a public performance, the first time I had frequented that pub, and the first time I had some many beautiful women pining for me. This was also the first time someone had flirted with me that way that my Beatrice did. That evening, as I chaperoned her home, we could have had requited our love, but she was a bit tipsy and I am too much a gentleman to take advantage of a lady. Lust is not love.

While I sat chatting with this woman with beautiful eyes, I had a deep, and abiding sense of déjà vu. As we spoke I remembered back to my first crush when I was a young boy of five. A day or so after the burlesque I sat down and wrote a short essay and submitted it to a Valentine's Day contest with Pique Magazine in Whistler, BC. And lo and behold I won one of their Valentine's Day contest prizes, which I will return to in a moment. This is what I wrote,

“My neighbor was a girl my age and fun to play with. We shared an interest in picture books. I remember her pleasant smile and her

giggle, and her wonderful eyes and her curly red hair. We could not wait to enter first grade.

But sadly she would not make it. One day she went away to the hospital. When she came home I knew something was wrong. But neither she nor her parents would say what. My once energetic and happy friend now had neither energy nor happiness.

One day I snuck over to see her. She was asleep. I thought my prized teddy bear would bring her good luck and tucked it into bed beside her. She took it with her to the hospital. She never came home.

The time between her diagnosis and her demise was eight months. It was a childhood leukemia that took her.

Her parents, on their return from the hospital were overcome with grief. They asked me if I wanted my teddy bear back. I said no. I wanted her to have it, to play with it in heaven.

She was buried with my teddy bear.”

After the evening’s festivities were over I took my Beatrice home by bus to the front door of the apartment building she lived in, gave her my email and kissed her on both cheeks. I said she had seen more of me than most of my other friends and invited her to go for lunch with me next week. I hope to meet my Beatrice again, before too long, and when she is sober. It is somewhat heartbreaking for me, but I am still waiting ...

When I heard I had won one of the prizes from the *My First Crush* Valentine's Day contest with Pique Magazine I decided to give the \$ 700 worth of prize gifts, things like a dinner for two and a massage for two, that sort of things, to the Emergency Room Nurses at Lions Gate Hospital in North Vancouver. The nurse there do such a wonderful job looking after me when I am brought in by ambulance with a heart beat that bottoms out at 44 beats per minute, with no obvious cause, or strange symptoms along those lines. They help me feel better and send me on my way.

My friends know me well enough to understand why it is I will go to the ends of the earth, or in this case, to heaven and back for them. You probably wonder why I said heaven, instead of hell. There is no hell in my life just heaven and purgatory, my life on this hard earth. Satan knows he can't have my soul, so he leaves me alone. I belong to God and provided I continue to do good deeds, he lets me live in my own private purgatory.

They have invited me back to do be an Artist's Model, and there for the grace of God go I. It is the romantic in me ... that I am a product of the Renaissance, or maybe that I hear the words of Dante ringing in my ears, that I may glimpse my Beatrice, or once again reminisce about my first crush.

Maybe it is just that I am Venus with a ...

well, you can figure it out.

The Party Girl

I first met her on a bus on a dark October evening. I was on my way home after a long day at work. She and her best friend were on their way to someplace special. I was already on the bus, having stepped aboard a few stops before they did, when the two of them giggled their way onto the bus. They were all dressed up, and instinctively I knew to comment “you must be on your way to a nice party.” It was a Saturday night, and so it was a safe guess.

The two girls were close friends, and very different. She was tall with short hair, a brunette with a stunning figure which could not easily be hidden away behind the beautiful silk dress with rose pattern she was wearing, and a leather jacket which neither matched her, or her dress. The dress fitted her loosely and so one could wonder if it was her’s, or whether she had secreted it from her mother’s wardrobe. I thought perhaps she had. The way she was dressed was a sort of dichotomy, of her wanting both to be noticed and not noticed, all at the same time. I sensed she was standing at the edge of one of life’s precipices.

She was also wearing expensive shoes. Most men don’t take in a woman’s shoes, instead choosing to ogle their breasts and other assets, but I learned from experience that what a woman wears on her feet tells you a great deal about their expectations in life, and their personality. If the shoes are plain and simple, then their expectation and personality are in kind. If the shoes are bling-bling, then they are risk takers. She was a risk taker. And,

although it was a dark and stormy night, her shoes were open toed, and she had painted her toe nails a soft, feminine pink.

Her friend was very different – stouter and big boned. I doubt anyone on the bus even noticed her walking in her best friend's shadow. They had both stepped on the bus on the last stop on Marine Drive, before it turned up the hill. Her friend wore a simple fabric jacket over a simple fabric dress and wore simple shoes. However, there was something about her deportment that told me that behind her simplicity there was a passionate heart, craving intimacy. I wonder, as I sat there, whether she was the one who would be risqué that evening.

I could guess where they were off to. There was a house up the hill of some reputation. The parents lived overseas. The three children lived there with a live-in nanny – an older boy and two younger sisters. On most weekends it was the party house of the twenty year old Persian boy and three of his closest Persian friends. I called him the *Shah*.

The four of them sometime beetled around town in an old white Oldsmobile, when his driver's license was still in his back pocket, but more times than not it was not because very late at night, after a weekend of partying here, there and everywhere, he would be stopped impaired and well, the ol' Oldsmobile was parked for a few months while he tried to sober up a bit. He enjoyed life too much and so this never seemed to be possible, which in the end didn't really matter to him, for what is the expression, *if you can't bring Mohammed to the mountain, bring the mountain to Mohammed*. This Saturday night I could only wonder about the two young women on the bus

on their way to meet the *Shah*. Did they really know what they are getting themselves into?

I knew of the Persian boy. In a strange twist of circumstances I had been invited by him to come to his seventeenth birthday, a few years back. I had been sitting in a coffee shop doing some writing when he happened in to tell everyone of his birthday party. He was disappointed that none of his friends in the café said they would come. I was bored so I decided to have some fun and said I might ‘*pop in for birthday cake.*’ He was happy I would, and I did. I knew he was trying so hard to make friends, but not succeeding to the extent he hoped.

I also knew the *Shah* having been invited to go to a Saturday night binge or two, an enticement I did not feel I wanted to fulfill. The parties they threw, and the stories that were told around town, were things of urban legends. It was a cross culture sort of a legend. At their parties the Persian boys flirted with non-Persian girls, and the Persian girls went after non-Persian boys, and well, discretion forces me to stop here. If you were inexperienced in the ways of the world then you had to make a choice how much you might want to change your outlook on life. If, on the other hand, you were experienced, then *Vivre la Difference!*

I sensed the two girls on the bus were at the edge of their own precipii. How do I know this? It was two things the Party Girl said to me. Nervously, she invited me to go with her to the party. I had just met her, but I am a gentleman and she was asking me whether I could be the arm on which she

could lean on that evening. She was also only ‘*going to talk with people she knew at the party.*’

I smiled as I responded, “it was past my bedtime. You’ll have a nice party.” She was truthfully disappointed, but her shadow was not. I knew then and there that the Party Girl would be fine. It was her friend who would be tossing her panties off that night.

I tipped my hat to them, and stepped off the bus.

But Soft What Light ...

It has been nearly four decades since the awkwardness of the thing, but I felt it so strongly last week it was as if the whole affair had transpired last week. And, well, to be perfectly honest, it was still rather awkward.

What triggered my remembrance was a poignant story told me by a fourteen year old girl I am tutoring this summer. If she had not told me her age I would have thought her to be a good three or four years older. She is an early bloomer and the roses of youthfulness have made her Venus' younger sister. Last year, in her grade eight English class, her teacher chose her to play the role of Juliet in a class presentation of William Shakespeare's romantic play *Romeo and Juliet*.

She explained how uncomfortable it was for her to be so close to a male classmate in some of the scenes, as well as to let him kiss her. She didn't like him enough to choose to kiss him of her own volition. She wanted to be kissed on the cheek and he, well wanted to be rather French. He, of course, took the whole matter wrongly and, well the kiss set him into high spirits, and well, with the brush of her bosom against his chest, so kicked in his raging pubescent hormones.

The rest of her story is rather personal and somewhat priceless. She nailed her role and he made a total fool of himself. Summer holiday away from him could not come fast enough!

As it happened, when I was in my grade nine English class we did our own version of *Romeo and Juliet*, and well ... you guessed it, I was chosen by the teacher to play the role of Romeo.

At the time I was a thin wisp of a boy, shy and anything but a Romeo, in the truest or traditional sense of the role. I was a Catholic boy going to a Catholic bilingual French-English school surrounded by Nuns, crucifixes and the constant reminders of original sin ... in a nutshell, inescapable and incessant reminders of what being a good Catholic meant. I was so chaste that I had yet to even kiss a girl, let alone dance with one. At that awkward time in my life love to me was something expressed in a Shakespearean sonnet

*From the fairest creatures we desire increase,
That thereby beauty's rose might never die ...*
(Sonnet 1)

Casting me in the role of Romeo was a truly unpopular one, among most of the boys in particular and among some but not all of the girls in my class. It was probably the main controversy of that school year, or at least it felt as much for me. Several of the boys and girls in my class had already shared a bed. Everyone knew that. And here was Romeo being played by a chaste and celibate boy.

From the moment it was decided, I was bullied in the worst sort of way but some of the boys who hoped to intimidate me out of the role. The bullying that goes on in boy's locker rooms at middle school gyms would be a source of endless fascination for psychologists and sociologists if they had the

courage and the fascination to enter them. At the very least they might realize that the 1980's film *Porky's* to be a bit on the mild side. The worst was when someone that very week broke into my gym locker and masturbated into my gym shoes. Come to think of it ... given the mess ... it couldn't have just been a single onanist but a handful of *manusturpares*.

Some of the girls also gave me a cold shoulder, although as you can imagine that really didn't bother me as much as being punched or kicked or bullied in other ways while doing Phy Ed.. Given who I was at that point in my life, I would wonder why anyone would want to play Juliet opposite this Romeo. Maybe it was the status of the thing.

Whatever that was going on that ninth year at school, for some of my classmate, but not me mind you, it was high drama. I vaguely recall today that the most gruesome of the twosomes were Diane and Richard who anxiously and avidly coveted the lead roles as they were avowed and promiscuous philanders. I smile as I remember this for she was a flat as the Canadian Prairies and a sort of Twiggy under study, and he had a voice that could scrap the paint off the side of an old barn. If they had played the lead they would have turned that year's *Romeo and Juliet* into a modern day comedy – *Twiggy and Twang*.

You would have wondered whether they would know better, for later that year, in fact, one of the girls in our class would get pregnant, although the baby's father was a boy a few grades ahead who went to another school, a Protestant one to boot. Being a Catholic the now sixteen year old mother bore the baby and offered her child up to adoption. The mother was not

allowed to return to our Catholic school afterwards and ended up at a public one instead, ostracized by almost all of her classmates except me.

When I came to her defense, the rumor that abounded was that I was the father, but I didn't mind the rumor if it meant a certain luscious patina to my knightly armor. Why, given the circumstance, would I go out of my way to dispel such a rumor, why? At one point even my mother found the need to ask me ... *are you the father* ... and well, we do have to be honest with our mothers.

Unbeknownst to my mother though my pregnant classmate had let me touch her belly and feel the kick of her baby. She had lifted her blouse and made sure I understood how grand she was and how inadequate the bosoms of my other female classmates were at the time. It was then that I first had the epiphany that God created women's breasts to make us men envious.

And well, without at all asking, she also let me spy la source de la vie for the first time covered, mind you, in her luxurious mystery of chestnut colored pubic hair. To try to imagine a baby entering the world by such a petite, soft and gentle slip made it obvious to me, then and there, that a baby is indeed a gift from God. These few minutes were an education about the birds and the bees that no Catholic textbooks could provide.

Has my story strayed too far into undiscovered country?

Even today I do not understand why I was chosen to play the role of Romeo. Perhaps the main reason why was that at this awkward stage in my life I

wasn't to be easily distracted by kisses and bosoms. Don't get me wrong ... I love women and am heterosexual ... but at that stage in my growing up I was late bloomer. Oh, and I had already shown my interest in Shakespearean sonnet.

*Those hours that with gentle work did frame,
The lovely gaze where every eye doth dwell*
(Sonnet 5)

The real awkwardness though was opposite to me chosen to play Juliet was a girl named Debra (not her real name) who took it upon herself to do a deep and meaningful character study. She had brown colored hair that she had dyed blonde. She left her eye brows their original color (I still do not understand why women do this, dye their hair one color and leave their eye brows another).

I guess it wasn't fair to Debra but I had a crush on someone else. It was just that that other person was the girl who played Juliet in the 1968 Zeffirelli Film, Olivia Hussey! The movie had played on the CBC late one Saturday night in the previous fall of that school year, and I may add well before I knew we would be performing Shakespeare and before I knew I would be chosen to play Romeo, and well ... it was love at first sight. What prepubescent boy would not fall in love with Olivia Hussey, especially after seeing her eyes and listening to her voice and catching a glimpse of her fancies.

Frankly, stacked up against Olivia Hussey, Debra did not have a chance and I did not have the courage, nor the heart to tell her the real reason why.

Sure, Debra had breasts, both large like grapefruits, in fact one larger than the other. How do I know this? Well, be patient, all will become apparent in due time. She also had no hips, and well, apart from her eye brows there was another affirmation that she was not a natural blonde, but all in due time.

But, in tribute to Debra, she did earnestly try her damndest to seduce her Romeo. And she did up to a point, but beyond that point all I wanted to do was hide under my bed.

It all started the afternoon we were given our roles and copies of the play to rehearse with. Our English teacher let us loose in the theatre that afternoon to find quiet corners to start to learn our lines. I guess, the first mistake was to let her take me by the hand to a quiet corner of the stage and to let her choose which scene to start rehearsing.

Of course, she chose the balcony scene, which amorous and warm blooded girl wouldn't, and lo and behold, the whole affair started

But, soft! what light through yonder window breaks?

It is the east, and Juliet is the sun.

(Romeo and Juliet, Act II, Scene II)

As I was a serious young man, I seriously took up the role. But she, time and time again, found fault with my diction, my cadence, the edge to my delivery, the missing softness in my words, and the lack of romance in my voice. By the fifth take it should have been evident to me that she was

swimming in her panties, but I was naïve and well, she was having fun being Juliet.

Is it possible to spend the better part of an hour repeated two lines of seventeen words from a 17th century play over and over and over again. If the words had been written by anyone else, no it would not be possible, but this was Shakespeare at his finest and well, Juliet and I were rehearsing his most celebrated scene.

Thankful, just before we did the scene a sixth time the bell announced the end of both our class and our day at school. I made my escape and wondered what I had done to deserve such a predicament. I loved Shakespeare and was honored to be chosen to play a lead role in one of his famous plays, but I sensed that perils awaited me playing Romeo in the midst of maiden Debra.

English was a class I took every second day and so I figured there would be a reprise from Shakespearean drama the following day, but no, the very instant I arrived at school the following morning, there was Debra wearing a white dress and clutching her Shakespeare ever so closely to her heaving bosom, wondering if I would like to ‘*rehearse*’ with her. She looked like she hadn’t slept a wink, and perhaps she hadn’t.

The way she said ‘rehearse’ warned me away. She said it the way that Marilyn Monroe might say “*Isn’t it delicious ...*” as her skirt billows up in the movies. From where I was standing I could tell Debra hadn’t a brassiere

on, and well if her skirt did billow, or I were to look up to the balcony from below I might just blush and forget my lines.

“But we don’t have English until tomorrow,” and in a bit of pique, as I brushed past her and looked back she billowed her skirt and I had been proven right, I would have blushed and forgotten my lines. She wasn’t wearing her panties either!

Well, as you can imagine, one dramatic scene led to another and another, but somehow I managed to survive our ‘rehearsals’ with my virtue intact until the afternoon we performed before our school and it was the balcony scene that was nearly both our undoing.

A few days before our afternoon school performance our teacher had us sit through a matinee screening of Zeffirelli’s 1968 Film *Romeo and Juliet*, with a few moments censored away. How it was censored was rather practical. The film was being projected using an old style projector and at the bedroom scene where Romeo and Juliet consummate their nuptials the nun simply held a book in front of the lenses to keep our virgin minds from being corrupted by Romeo’s back side and Juliet’s breasts.

Of course, foolish me, I had already told Debra I had seen the whole film, including the expunged bit and well she kept at me until I was forced by her to tell her what she had missed. I would have thought a bare backside and breasts would have shocked her, but instead a strange look came over her face, a look that was anything but shocking. She perhaps then understood my crush on Olivia Hussey.

In the previous rehearsals Juliet had been up on the balcony and I had stayed with my feet firmly planted to the ground. This had brought me much solace. But the teacher the day of our performance insisted that if I were to climb the balcony then the two of us, Juliet and her Romeo, could be cheek to cheek for the famous balcony scene. It would be more realistic she insisted. I could not fit them both.

That day I did not have light amorous wings and it was a bit of a climb to get the ten feet up to the balcony, and to Juliet. No one had ever tried climbing up to the balcony before, and I imagine no one has since at the school.

I don't know how I made it up and I tried to not botch my words. Things started to unravel when we got to my words ...

O, wilt thou leave me so unsatisfied?

Then Debra smiled and tugged at a ribbon that had held together the bodice on her costume and well out she nearly popped. With a smirk she said her words ..

What satisfaction canst thou have to-night?

I tried to look away but my heart started to pound and my footing started to topple ... I struggled with my words ...

The exchange of thy love's faithful vow for mine.

She leaned forward, and both her breasts spilled out, one bigger than the other, and said her words ...

*I gave thee mine before thou didst request it:
And yet I would it were to give again.*

I knew I was slipping ... I looked back at the audience then at her, then down to the ground below. Without looking up at her I bravely continued on ...

Wouldst thou withdraw it? for what purpose ... ?

I had missed a word at the end of that sentence ... she whispered the word *love* ... I looked up at her. Debra's eyes glittered as she said this.

I looked at her for a second thinking she had forgotten her next words. She had now spilled completely out of her bodice.

*But to be frank, and give it thee again.
And yet I wish but for the thing I have:
My bounty is as boundless as the sea,*

As she said bounty she looked down at her breasts and my eyes followed hers.

My love as deep;

Our eyes met and the warmth her eyes exuded flooded my heart and soul. Her voice became deep and lusty ... she wasn't helping me. I was quickly losing my grip.

the more I give to thee,

She had inched herself forward until our lips were mere millimeters apart. Now she was whispering. I very much doubt that anyone other than I could hear what she was now saying.

The more I have,

She closed her eyes. At that instant I knew she was going to kiss me.

for both are infinite.

And so I let her ... and so she did. It was a warm and priceless kiss. There was not pretense to it. It was real, it was wonderful.

And so her Romeo climbed up onto her balcony to amorously embrace his Juliet.

There was a tremendous roar from the audience that all but overpowered the futile efforts of our teacher to get us back onto our queues. We didn't care.

Beyond the edge of the balcony we were all alone. Debra let the rest of her bodice drop and well it wasn't a bodice at all but a beautiful night dress. She had her back to the audience and they could see that her costume had dropped. I peered past her at the audience and saw that Diane and Richard

both had their mouths wide open in disbelief. Then and only then did I peek down at Debra's night dress at her feet and also saw that she was not a natural blonde.

I looked up into her face. It glowed, soft and bright. We were both glad our teacher insisted I climb up the balcony that afternoon.

Forgotten was Olivia Hussey, and the rest of our lines for Act II, Scene II.

... and oh ... *it was so delicious.*

The Perfect Picture

It was a Sunday morning around 8:00 when she telephoned. I could tell by the softness and the hesitation in her voice that something was amiss. Please come ... “she pleaded. I said I would.

So I wrote a little note and left it on the kitchen table, “going for a walk to Lynn Canyon Park and will be back around noon” and then stealthily went on my way.

I walked to her place, leaving the car. It was only a fifteen minute walk. When I arrived I knocked on the door. She opened it. I could tell she had been crying. She was still dressed in her night outfit, which surprised me.

“I am so glad you came,” she said as she swung the door closed behind me. “It was awful!” Then she gave me a hug. She had not hugged me before and I could feel her through the night dress.

I had been tutoring her math and physics for two years. Now she was just a few days away from graduating. I knew her graduation dance had been the night before. Something had obviously happened.

“Where’s your dad?” She had only one parent, for her mother had drowned the year before in an accident.

“Oh ... he’s gone to a wedding for the day.”

“Didn’t you want to go too? I thought girls like weddings.”

“No ... I didn’t. I feel bad enough, and don’t need to be reminded ...” She let the rest of the sentence slide for we both knew what she meant to say. I knew what she meant to say was that she didn’t need to be reminded that my mother was gone.

She led the way up the stairs. I followed her. She was not being modest this morning with me. I looked away. The cut of the gown was high and she wore nothing underneath. When we got to the top of the stairs I said “shouldn’t you get dressed or something?”

She acted as if she hadn’t heard me. Oh well.

“So tell me ... what was awful?”

She stopped and turned to face me. “Last night my date ditched me at the graduation dance. I had to walk home in the rain. I ruined my dress.” She sniffled as she said this. “And I think I am catching a cold.”

“You must be cold. Why don’t you at least put on a robe and slippers.” She nodded and disappeared up the next flight of stairs. I walked over to the kitchen, which was across the living room. She lived in a split level rancher with a lofty living room. It was a sunny morning and the sun streamed into the middle of the living room. The kitchen was clean and well organized.

I looked out the back window at the yard. It was a bright May morning. The flowers were in bloom. I turned around and looked around the living room. It too was clean and organized. In actual fact the house always seemed in perfect order. Here was a family that took pride in their lives.

I was standing to my back to the stove when she reappeared. She had a pink robe on and pink bunny rabbit slippers. I smiled. She was wrapping herself in her robe. As she got closer to me I looked down at her slippers and started to laugh. "They are all you." The slippers were pink bunny rabbits with ears that flopped back and forth as she walked.

"They were a birthday gift from my ..."

She stopped herself before she could say mother. She gave me another hug. I let her hold onto me for as long as she wished. I could tell she was very lonely.

She looked up at me and smiled. "Feeling better?" I asked her.

"A bit ... thanks for asking." She let go and stood beside me.

"Have you had breakfast?"

She shook her head. I smiled at her then turned to face the stove. "So what will it be?"

"You'll make me breakfast?" She was surprised.

I nodded. "How about eggs and toast?"

“Poached them will you ... a girl has got to look after her figure.” As she said this she pulled her robe close to her body.

I smiled as she said this for she was slim and petite, and hardly needed to worry about her figure. “Poached it is then. How many?”

“Two for me ... and you? She placed her hands at the edge of the counter and pushed herself away from the counter top with her arms.

“I have already had breakfast ... but I could do with a good cup of coffee.”

She sprung into action, opened a cabinet, extracted a cup and walked over to the coffee machine. I watched the ears flop back and forth. Taking the carafe from the machine she began to slowly and carefully pour a cup of coffee for me. “You don’t drink coffee do you?” I asked her.

“No, I never touch the stuff. It tastes horrible.” She made a face as she said this.

“Chaque a sont gout” I responded.

“Huh?”

“Each to their own taste.”

“Exactly!” She giggled as she handed me my cup of coffee. “I will stick to my orange juice.”

I took a sip of the coffee.

“Is it good?”

It was still quite hot and must have been made recently. It was a bit bitter but I fought the urge to add something to it.

I must of made a bit of a face because she asked “no cream or sugar?” I shook my head.

“It’s fine.”

“My father just left before you arrived. You missed him by five minutes. He just made himself some coffee this morning before he dashed out the door. He’ll be gone for most of the day.”

I nodded. She walked over to the refrigerator and opened the door, extracting a dozen eggs. I grabbed for a pan hanging over the stove and began to fill the pan with cold water. “Any vinegar?”

“Vinegar? What do you need that for?”

“You always put a dash of vinegar in with the water when you poach eggs.”

“Really? Why?” She walked over and set the dozen eggs down on the counter next to the stove.

“Damned if I know.” She had a point. Why? I shrugged my shoulders. I placed the pan on the stove as she looked down in one of the cupboards for some vinegar. She found some red wine vinegar and placed it next to the stove.

“I guess that will have to do,” she said.

“Oeufs a la Parisienne. It will give the poached eggs a rich European taste.” I opened the egg container. There were four eggs in the carton. “On second thought I think I will have two as well.”

We let the water heat for a few minutes and talked some more. “What happened at your graduation dance?”

She looked down and paused. “I don’t know where to begin.”

“Well ... we have lot’s of time. Why don’t you begin at the beginning?”

She looked up at me and I could sense the pain that she felt. She could not form the first word so I did.

“Did he ask you to go to the dance with you?”

“Well ... sort of.”

“Is he your boyfriend?” That question set her off. It was like lighting the fuse on a stick of dynamite.

“Noooo ... heaven forbid.” I had heard her mother say this expression from time to time. “I don’t have a boy friend!”

“You don’t! I am surprised, a pretty girl like you.” I did not say this to tease her but to encourage her. I knew she was shy and introverted. But I was when I was her age, and well, even I had a ‘girlfriend’ when I was in high school. “Do you have friends who are boys?”

She paused and gave me a funny look. “I have you ...”. When she said that I turned back to the water in the pan that had begun to boil.

“I guess you do.” I poured some of the red wine vinegar into the boiling water and the room immediately began to smell of the vinegar. Then I reached for a wooden spoon and started to stir the water round.

“What are you doing?”

“Watch ...” I grabbed an egg and cracked it into the swirling water. Then I quickly grabbed a second. Before the third egg I needed to give the water another stir. In two blinks of an eye the four eggs were in the boiling water. I turned down the heat and covered the pan. “That should do it ... want to make the toast?”

She grinned and dashed to the fridge to get the bread and popped two pieces into the toaster. Then she returned to the fridge to get the butter and strawberry jam. She set the butter and the jam on the table.

“Soft or hard?”

“Huh?” She looked up at me with a puzzled expression.

“The eggs ...silly.” I chortled.

“Oh ...” she peered over at the steam drifting up from the pan. “Soft is fine.”

Then she poured herself a glass of orange juice and set two places out at the table. By the time she had done all this, the eggs were poached and ready to be enjoyed.

“Bring me the plates.” She obliged and I took a slotted spoon and lifted the first egg carefully out of the pan, letting water drip off of it for few seconds. Then I did the same with a second egg. Almost on queue the toaster popped and out appeared two perfectly toasted pieces of bread. “Those are yours,” I said handing her the plate. She gave me the second, empty plate, walked over to the toaster and retrieved her two pieces.

As she shuffled over the ears on her bunnies flopped back and forth in a breakfast dance. She plunked two new pieces of bread into the toaster, latched it down and then went to her place at the table and set her plate down. “Go ahead and eat before your eggs get cold.”

“I will wait for you.”

“You can, can you.” She nodded. There was a sweetness to her disposition that made her special. She did not have a selfish bone in her body. At least that is what I thought since she was never selfish when I was around her. She was always kind and considerate to me. Is anyone so perfect?

I slotted the remaining two eggs on my plate, turned the element off and carefully lifted the pan onto a cold element.

“What are you doing?”

“Oh ...” I looked back and realized what she was asking. “Sort of a double safety thing.”

“Double safety?”

“If I forget and leave it on the element the water will boil off. That’s not good. If I forget to turn the element off and yet moved the pan to a cold element, then all I am doing is heating the room. You see, I am awfully absent minded.”

“I have noticed,” she smiled a toothy smile “that you are absent minded.”

I walked to the table, set down my plate and sat next to her. “Go ahead, don’t wait. I will wait for my toast.”

She spread a little measure of butter on her toast and then a thick layer of strawberry jam. I watched as she spread the jam carefully, covering almost all of the top of her toast with the jam. I felt this was an intimate look into her psyche.

The toaster popped and we both jumped. I looked at her in surprise and she did me and she began to giggle. “I can see you are feeling much better.”

“Whenever I am with you I am happy.”

Of course this begged the question. “And when you’re not?”

“I depends.”

“On what?” She took a bite from her toast. She hadn’t yet even touched her eggs.

“On who I am with, and what it is we are doing.” She set the toast down on the corner of her plate.

“Like yesterday.” I studied her face. Her face became stern and serious.

“Yes, like yesterday.”

“What happened?” I picked up a piece of toast and began to butter so that it appeared I was taking a casual notice of what we were talking about. In fact

my ears were piqued on each nuance of both what she was saying and the words she was using.

“He picked me up. Well sort of, I was the fourth in a car with his best friend, his best friend’s girlfriend and him. The trouble was ...” she stopped cold.

I put some jam onto my toast and slowly spread the strawberry around. I did not look up at her for fear my gaze would rob her of her courage.

“The trouble was his best friend’s girlfriend is my worst femeny ...”

I looked up with a start. She had used a word I had never heard before but whose meaning I could assume by context. But I felt it best, to keep her talking, to ask her. “What’s a femeny?”

She smirked. “It’s the worst form of enemy a girl can have ... another girl. It’s a female enemy ... a femeny.”

I nodded understanding.

“From the moment my date picked me up to the moment he bailed, she was at me. First, why we had kept them waiting when they came to pick me up. If I knew she was there in the car I would have gotten my father to drive me to the dance, but my date did not tell me.”

“That sounds ominous!” I took a piece of egg and lifted it to my mouth. “You should have your breakfast as we eat.” I said this thinking it would take the edge off what we were talking about.

She looked down at her eggs and then pushed the plate away from herself. “I am not hungry.”

“At least eat the toast.” I pushed her plate back towards her.

She picked up the piece of toast she had already eating and nibbled on it. I took the second piece of bread off my plate, buttered it and put a heavy layer of strawberry jam on it and then placed it on her plate. “For strength,” I said.

“What happened next?”

“My dress was much better then hers. She’s well ...”

I looked at her with concern.

She set down her toast and took her hands under her petite bosom and pulled them up. I smirked my understanding.

“You know you are perfect. Just because she has big breasts doesn’t make her a better girl.”

“Tell that to my date and his best friend! They acted like jerks towards me.”

“No!”

“Yup, and she was edging him on. She had plenty of cleavage showing and even let the two of them touch the top of her breast.”

“No! And what did they do?”

“They went ahead and well she had them wrapped around her little finger in no time. My date even tried to put his hand down the front of my dress to check me out!”

I shook my head. “What a jerk. It’s good you dumped him. What didn’t you stay for the dance?”

“I couldn’t! I just couldn’t. Especially after ...”

“After what?”

“She walked into the dance with her date on one arm and mine on the other. So I just ran home.”

I remembered that it was raining cats and dogs last night. “That’s rough. Poor you!” I reached across the table and touched her hand. It was very warm.

“When I got home I was glad my dad had gone out. He doesn’t know that my date bailed. If he did he would wring his neck for sure, but I don’t ever want to see or talk to him again. You won’t tell him will you?”

I shook my head. “Can’t blame you for coming home.” She was now holding back her tears. “Now now, don’t cry.” But my words had the opposite effect. They opened the flood gates and she began to cry.

“Do you think I have small breasts?” her words came out choked.

My jaw dropped. “Ummm ...” I was dumbfounded. I hadn’t expected her to ask me such a loaded question. I raised my eyebrows, “ummm...” I didn’t know what to say. It was a no win situation. “I have never”

Before the next word left my mouth she had opened her robe and dropped it off her shoulders and there they were. I quickly covered my eyes with my hands, dropping a piece of toast on the table, but not before I caught a glimpse of her.

“See ... even you don’t want to see what I look like!”

“It’s not that. It’s well, sort of awkward what we are doing.” I let my hand drop and there she sat with tears streaming down her face onto her two breasts. There she sat both bold and defiant. They were pink and even from across the table I could tell her breasts were soft and virginal. “You are very beautiful. ”

“You don’t think they are too small?” She lifted them up with her hands.

I looked down at her. My mouth was suddenly dry. I reached over for my coffee and took a swig. “They are perfect for your size.” I set the cup down, nearly knocking it over. She was no longer so tearful “Can I ask you something?

“Yes.”

“The other girl, is she slim like you or over weight?”

“Over weight.”

“Humph, well that explains it... what do you think a breast is?”

She looked down at herself, then looked up. “I don’t know. You tell me.”

“It is fatty tissue. Big breasts on a woman means she has plenty of body fat.” I know it was a bit of a white lie, but the circumstances warranted it.

“I hadn’t thought of it that way.” She let down her hands. Her nipples had by now become prominent and the areole was very much alive from her touch.

“You are athletic and in very good health. There are many women with big breasts who would be envious of you.”

“They would?” She leaned back in her chair. Her breasts giggled just a bit as she moved about.

“You know they get tired to carry the girls about, and they have sore shoulders and stiff necks. And they worry about cysts and god knows what else.”

She smiled.

I leaned forward and placed my elbows on the table and placed my head in my hands. “Do you know why god created women’s breasts?”

“To feed babies ...”

“Well, yes. That’s a given. But I think the real reason why God created women’s breasts ... was to make men envious.”

She giggled, placing her hand across herself as she jiggled.

“You know something ...” She took up the arms of her robe and put her pink robe back across her shoulders. Then she hugged herself. I handed her my handkerchief. She dried her eyes.

“What?”

She lifted a piece of toast to her mouth and savored the strawberry. Then she licked her lips before she spoke. “I love you.”

I took up a piece of my toast, leaned back and smiled. “I know.”

We had talked and she had gotten some of her angst off her chest. She was now happier. It was then that her appetite came back with a vengeance. She finished her toast with strawberry jam, and then dived straight into her poached eggs after garnishing it with fresh crushed pepper. Four healthy bites and the two poached eggs were history.

Slowly sipping my coffee, I watched her as she filled her appetite. Not only did she look a great deal happier, her face now glowed with innocence and youthfulness. I got up, walked casually over to the coffee machine and poured myself another cup. My back was turned to her when she next spoke.

“Thanks ...” I could hear her put her fork and knife down on her plate. “I feel a lot better.”

I did not turn back to face her. “I can see that.”

“I didn’t eat much last night.”

I looked up and saw my reflection in the window in front of me. “Would you like some more?”

“No.” I could hear her push the plate across the table.

“Nervous were you?”

“Huh?”

“Last night?” She looked down and nodded. She touched the edge of her plate. She had finished her breakfast yet I sensed she still wanted something more.

“Can I ask you something?” she asked me ever so diffidently.

“Sure.” I smiled, but I doubt she caught my smile in my reflection. I wondered what it was she was going to ask me. I turned back to face her.

“What was your grad dance like?” Was that all, I thought.

“I don’t know,” I looked down and shrugged my shoulders “... didn’t go.”

She suddenly looked up at me. Her face had become flush and her eyes sparkled. “What?”

I shook my head. “Didn’t go!”

“No” She lifted the collar of her gown and tucked her head down into her shoulders. Her robe opened a bit and she showed some of her shoulders.

“Yup.”

“Why didn’t you go?” She drew out the word you ...

“Well ... to be perfectly honest I had no one who wanted to be my date, and my parents had all but forgotten me by that point, and so what was the reason to go?

“Didn’t anyone notice you missing?

I shook my head. No ... no one did. If I had gone I would have sat there by myself the whole night watching other people dancing and enjoying themselves.”

“That’s very sad.” She had a frown on her face.

“You think so?” I frowned as well. “In grade twelve I was a very shy boy and pretty new to the school.”

“You shy?” She smirked unbelieving as she said that.

I nodded and smirked back. “Very. I didn’t really know anyone, except maybe my high school physics teacher Mr. Armstrong, and the teacher I had for Civilizations Mr. Koenig.”

She interjected, ‘It can be hard in hard school if you are shy ...’

I finished the sentence, “and twice as hard if you are new to the school. If you hadn’t asked me about my graduation dance ... I wouldn’t have even bothered to remember.”

There was a pause while neither of us spoke. “It’s ironic,” I said quietly.

“How is it ironic?” she asked with a half-knowing smile. “Because what happened to me?”

I nodded and then paused. “Well at least someone asked you to your graduation dance.” I hadn’t wanted to relate my crushing high school experience to her. She was studying my face. Well, what was I to do? I could be selfish and just talk about myself ... or I could live in the moment.

She gave me a sweet and understanding smile, almost as if she was reading my thoughts. Perhaps the expression on my face was that transparent. I studied her face. It was somewhere between philosophic and tearful. For her I decided we should live in the moment.

I lifted my cup to my mouth and took a sip of my coffee. She got up, walked around the kitchen table and stood silently in front of me. She was swinging the ends of the belt on her robe back and forth. Evidently, she too, wanted us to live in the moment.

“It seems ... we have much in common.” She said as she handed me one end of the belt and looked into my eyes.

“It seems we do?” I made a mocking smile. I knew she wanted me to draw open her robe.

She gave me an enigmatic smile in return, blushed and dropped her eyes. “I am shy too ...” she said almost in a whisper. I took her chin in my hand and raised her face, looking into her eyes. Her pupils were dilated. She was in a deep emotional turmoil. In such a state she would perhaps do anything. But anything would later be regretted, and get in the way of our friendship.

I nodded. “I guess we do.” I let the end of the belt go. “I had transferred into the school half way through grade eleven. I transferred in from a bilingual school. I was the boy with the French accent. I too was very lonely in high school.”

“I bet you were picked on,” she almost sighed as she said this.

“more teased and ignored then picked on. That all changed by chance one day ...”

“What happened? Did you suddenly become Casanova?” he said this with an impish grim.

“No. Something a lot better?” I grinned impishly in return.

“And what was that?” She cocked her head sideways while looking at me.

“I happen to be the school gymnasium one lunch hour and there was ‘string bean’ the star centre of the basketball team. He was practicing his baskets. He missed one try and well the ball rolled to my feet.”

“What did you do?” she asked intrigued.

“I picked up the basketball and sank a percentage shot!”

“A percentage shot? What’s that?”

“It’s a hard to complete shot. I was doing it from the corner of the court. I sank five shots in a row. Between the fourth and fifth success the head coach poked his head out of his office and watched me.”

“Wow!”

“Later that afternoon there was a knock on Mr. Koenig’s door and there was the head coach who poked his head into the class pointed at me and ushered me out with his finger. I thought I was in trouble.”

“And were you?”

“Not really. He said he was impressed with my basketball skills and wanted me to play on their team. I said I wasn’t interested.”

“What happened?”

“The coach got angry at me there and then asked don’t I believe in the school or something like that. I said I couldn’t play basketball anymore. I had torn all the ligaments in my right ankle so in grade twelve I couldn’t really run well ...”

“Too bad ... playing for the school basketball team would have made you very popular.”

“The story got out that I didn’t want to play basketball for the school and so I became even less popular. No one seemed to care that it was because of an athletic injury. Now I was twice as lonely in high school.

When I said twice as lonely she leaned forward and pressed herself against me and gave me a hug. She had pressed her breasts hard against me which nearly caused me to spill my coffee when she did this for I had not expected her to be so brash. I carefully set my coffee cup at the counter’s edge and wrapped my arms around her and gave her a long hug. She was shivering.

“Are you cold?” She nodded. She looked up at me. Her eyes were becoming tearful again. “Why don’t you pour yourself a nice hot bath? I will clean up here.”

She hugged me even closer, burying her face in my sweater. At that moment she seemed so innocent and fragile. I heard her say “You had no one in high school?” muffled by my sweater.

“You mean no girlfriend?” I replied.

She nodded without looking up.

“I had some girls who were friends. I would help them with their math homework, but no ... I didn’t have a girlfriend.”

“That’s so sad.” She emphasized the so ...

I lowered my chin and looked down at her. “My life then was rather complicated.” She lifted her face and looked up at me. I reached up and dried the tear on her right eye. “Something had happened to me when I was in middle school.”

“What?” She stepped back from me and looked so forlorn.

“Umm ... well ... “

“Huh?”

There was such intimacy in the moment that I got the courage to tell her. “It’s something that can only happen to boys.” I smirked.

“You bend something?” She giggled, pointing at me.

“No!” I covered myself mockingly with my hands.

“Broke something?” She wiggled her finger at me.

“Well ... sort of.”

“Really!” She looked up at me with a quizzical look.

I blushed. “I don’t know if I should tell you.”

“Please ... ” She leaned forward, her eyes sparkling.

I looked away. I felt her hand on my face as she guided my face back towards hers.

“Pretty please.” Her hand felt so soft and warm against my face.

“You’ve taken biology have you?” She nodded with a smirk on her face. “ ... the birds and the bees?”

I gathered my courage and continued. “Well, when I was entering puberty ... while my testicles were falling into place ... one of them ... you know ...” I looked down.

“Huh?” I don’t think she fully understood and so I took the end of her belt and tied it into a knot and dangled it. “It sort of tangled itself into a knot and well ... off to the hospital and emergency surgery I went.”

“Oh!” Her face flushed. “That must have hurt!”

“It was excruciating painful. I went into shock!”

She looked down at me. Her hand moved towards me and hesitated. I did not move, nor say a word and so she placed her hand onto me, cupping me from below.

“And now?” She looked up at me, her face very flush.

“Well ... I think things are fine. I still have two.”

“Think? Don’t you know?”

“I will only know for sure when ... well ...”

“When?”

“It comes time to try to make a baby, if ever ...”

She giggled and removed her hand. “Haven’t you been trying?”

I shook my head. “My wife says she doesn’t want to have children.”

“Oh ...” Her face softened. “That’s sad ... didn’t you know that when you were married?”

“I want children ... she knew that when we were married. But now she says she doesn’t.”

“How do you feel about that?”

“I don’t know.” I frowned as I said this and she noticed that I was melancholic. “I haven’t given it much thought.” I did not want to admit this to her, but I had been thinking about children a great deal and pondered what I might do.

“How about adopting?” She said half-heartedly.

“There’s a foster home across the street and well they have already asked us.”

“And?”

“She’s not interested in even adopting. My wife slammed the door in the face of the foster mother!”

“No!”

“Yes. Just a few weeks ago one of the little boys, a four year old, from the foster home ran out the front door and up the street screaming at the top of his lungs. The foster mother called me to chase after the boy and help him. Which I did.”

“What was wrong?”

“The little boy’s mother had just told him she didn’t want him anymore and so the little thing wanted to run away.”

“That’s horrible! Why would his mother have said that?”

“Well ... he was an unwanted child. The little boy’s mother had a new boy friend and he didn’t want the child. The new boy friend told her that it’s either him or her child. She chose him!”

“Some mothers are selfish!”

“Some mothers are poor, and don’t know how to cope.”

“So you’re defending her?”

“No ... just trying to understand her situation. Well, I took the little boy up in my arms and carried him crying back to the foster home. By then the fire department had been called and the police. It was quite a circus.”

There was a moment of silence before I spoke. “I felt very sorry for the little boy, but even I understood that raising children requires a full time commitment of both parents not just one and since I was the bread winner I could not wear those two hats at the same time.”

“Maybe you need to divorce her and find another wife.” When she said this it was quite unexpected. “You should be happy with your life!” she continued.

I looked at her face long and intently.

Then she said something else that was equally unexpected. “Divorce her and marry me.” For someone so young she was now showing her real colors. She hugged me close and laughed nervously as she said this.

I said and did nothing. I looked at her blonde hair, so soft and beautiful. She was being gentle and truthful with me. I admired her for that. I could not chastise her for her honesty and understanding. But I did not know whether I wanted to continue talking to her in such intimate terms about things that troubled me. “Maybe we should talk about something else?”

“Something else?” She looked at me for a few seconds before asking “what else?” There was a sense of intrigue in her voice.

I could feel her shivering, but this time I knew it was because she was overcome with apprehension. “You are shivering. Go pour yourself a nice hot bath ...” I said to her.

She stepped back from me. She looked at me with her big innocent eyes. Tears were welling up in my eyes and I did not want her to see me in this state. She could tell that I was upset. I turned to face the windows. “Yes go pour yourself a nice hot bath ...” I said to her a second time. “I need a few minutes by myself.” Behind me I could hear her slowly walk across the living room.

I closed my eyes and gripped the edge of the counter with my hands to steady myself. I suddenly felt drained and tired. It was my life that was tiring me out. Alone, I stood at the edge of my own melancholy.

Then after a few minutes I heard water being poured into a tub. I opened my eyes and looked at myself in the reflection in the window. She was right, I knew it. I should be happy in my life! “It took some spunk for her to say ‘divorce her and marry me.’

I turned around and then looked down. There was her pink robe, left at my feet. She had stepped out it and left it there and walked away without me even knowing. Wow, I thought. I stooped down and picked up her robe. It was still warm from her. I held it while I pondered the meaning to her boldness. I placed her robe on the back of her chair.

Then I heard my name being called. In a half daze I staggered across the living room and stopped at the base of the stairs. My emotions were bemuddled. The sound of the pouring water did not come from up the stairs, but down stairs instead.

I heard my name called a second time. It was like the call of a Siren beckoning her Odysseus down into the welcoming bosom of the sea. I followed the call down the stairs into the basement. I had never been in the basement before. It was as big as the first floor and divided into two large rooms and one smaller one. The door to the smaller room was opened and it was within that the sound of the pouring water came.

I walked across to the door and hesitated. I heard my name called a third time.

“Yes?” I answered timorously from outside the door.

“Come and join me,” was her reply.

I slowly entered the room. Off to the left it had a shower behind a frosted glass wall, a sauna off to the right side and near the middle of the room was a hot tub that was nearly half filled. Off to the side there was a small wooden chair, and a small metallic bucket and a small scrub brush, and a large bar of soap.

And there she was, kneeling naked at the edge of the tub, swishing the water with her hand. There was the siren beckoning me into her water.

She looked up at me. “There is enough room for two.”

I smiled at her and said. “Indeed there is.”

She looked down at the water and continued to swish the water back and forth with her hand. “Will you join me?” she asked hopefully, then looked up.

I leaned on the door frame, crossed my arms and smiled. “I don’t know if I should.”

“See that chair?” She pointed at it.

“Yes.” I looked over to the right.

“And the bucket, brush and soap?”

“It was a gift from a Japanese friend.”

“Man or woman?” I didn’t know where she was going with her narrative, but I thought I should ask.

“Woman ... do you know that in Japan men and women take baths together.”

“You mean Japanese couples, man and wife?”

“Yes, I guess so ... but I also men and woman who don’t really know each other.”

“Really.” I had heard of this. “What are you suggesting?”

“Unlike Westerners, the Japanese don’t wash themselves in their bath. They wash themselves out of the bath then clean off the soap and then soak in the hot tub. Or in the Onsen.”

“Onsen?” I had never heard the word before.

“Onsen means hot springs ... in Japanese.” She was looking at me intently.

“That sounds luscious.” I was beginning to understand what she was wanting.

“What is really nice is sometimes the woman wash the man and ...” she was smiling as she said this.

“And the man washes the woman ...” I finished the sentence for her.

She nodded.

“So it is not about sex then?”

“No ...” She almost whispered the word.

“So tell me what it is about.” I was beginning to open up to her proposal.

“Well ...” I could sense she was at a sudden loss for words. Perhaps she was scared she might trip up and I would lose interest.

“Is it about friendship?” I asked.

“Yes ...” she almost sang her answer, “and ...”.

I decided to continue to play her game, at least for another few minutes, and so I stepped slowly into the room. “And what?” I teased her with the question.

She got to her feet modestly covering her delta of Venus. She walked over to me and took my hands in hers. I looked into her eyes. They were not hungry eyes. They were not eyes wanting to eat me like a tigress might. No they were kind and loving eyes, of someone who wanted to be tender and to receive tenderness in return.

How could I say no to such eyes? I nodded and let her draw me into the room. She guided me to beside the small chair. I took off my tie and started to unbutton my shirt but she softly pushed aside my hands and unbuttoned my shirt for me. She slowly lifted my shirt off my body. Then she slowly and carefully folded my shirt.

I was watching her as she did all this. I marveled at her soft beauty. She still had that youthful glow to her skin, perhaps added on by the emotions she was feeling. I could feel her body warmth. She was flush all over her face, her breasts and her stomach. Her stomach was perfectly formed as were her hips and everything seemed to fit so perfectly together in her. Botticelli’s Venus was plump by comparison. Between her navel and her knees was a soft tuft of hair. She was a natural blonde. Partly hidden behind the sandiness of her was the outline of *la source de vie*. As she moved it came into and disappeared from view, as if it were a mirage.

Then she bent down and lifted my feet one at a time to remove my socks. The floor felt cool under my soles. I could feel goose bumps growing all over my body. She set the socks down side by side, ever so carefully.

She stood looking up into my eyes and she next undid the buckle on my belt and slowly drew my pants down. Now there was just one piece of clothing left. She folded my pants and set them beside my shirt. I wondered why she did not set it down atop my shirt? Maybe it was her style, to set everything by itself, instead of all together. Maybe life for her was like that – everything had its place and everything in its place.

I suddenly felt very self-conscious. When a woman is aroused there are subtle clues to her arousal, but for a man it is fully evident. I could tell she was aroused and no doubt she could tell I was as well. I was very nervous.

She turned back to face me smiled and then walked over to the tub to turn off the water. She knelt down and swished her hand through the water and said “just right.”

It was then that I realized that she had not said a thing since she started to undress me. And I had been silent too.

She looked down thoughtfully into the water as she swished her hand back and forth. I wondered what she was thinking. She seemed to be somewhere else at that particular moment. Back and forth went her hand ...

I waited for her to return to the here, and the now, before I spoke. “How are you feeling?”

“A little funny inside my tummy.”

“Like butterflies?”

She looked up at me and nodded.

I smiled. “We could stop.”

She shook her head slowly. “I don’t want to stop ...”

“But you don’t really want to go on do you.” I studied her circumspectly. She was looking at me. I took off my underwear and tossed them onto my pants, and sat myself down onto the little chair. “Come and wash my back.”

And so she did. She got up from the hot tub, came for the little bucket, filled it full of water then poured it down my back. It felt delicious. Then she started to scrub my back with the sponge and soap. “Feeling better? I asked her.

“Yes,” she almost whispered her response. She scrubbed my back with sweeping circles. It had been such a long time that someone had scrubbed my back that my spine tingle not only with the excitement of the moment but the sheer enjoyment of simple human touch. I decided to tell her that.

“It has been awhile.”

“Awhile?” She parroted back

“Since someone scrubbed my back.” I looked over my shoulder at her. I could see the side of her. She was kneeling on a towel that she had folded to protect her knees. Her Japanese friend had taught her well.

“My mother use to scrub my back when I was young ...” She looked at me as she said this.

“No one has scrubbed your back since?”

She shook her head.

“Not even your Japanese friend?”

“No not even her.”

“Did she not show you the rituals of the Japanese onsen?”

She paused for a moment and then understood what I implied. “Oh ... she only told me about them and gave me a book for my birthday ... we never ... you know ...”

“So this is your first ...”

She nodded. “I was wanting to enjoy an evening with my boy friend but when he dumped me ... well ...”

“His loss ... our gain.”

She looked up at me than started to giggle. At that point I knew that everything would be alright.

“What next?” I asked.

“Your arms.” She started with my left arm, pouring water down it and then scrubbing it from shoulder down to hand, inside and out, pouring water down the arm to wash away the soap. Then she did my right arm in the same way and then stood up and went back to the tub for more hot water.

Now came the tricky bit. She came back and sat in front of me putting the bucket to her right. I had my knees drawn together to begin with. She started to scrub my chest in big round circles. All along she kept a regular rhythm concentrating on her task and not looking up or speaking as she spoke. When she was finished she poured the rest of the entire bucket of water down the front of me. I hadn’t expected that.

She got up a third time and filled the bucket again and came and stood in front of me. She did not have to say anything. I understood what I needed to do by her actions. I stood and she began to scrub my legs. I knew she was trying to look away but a person’s peripheral vision is just too good not to notice the thing you are trying not to notice.

We were both trying to be nonchalant but the best of me was just not cooperating. It was being too conspicuous, not merely by its presence, but by its subtle motions as she scrubbed first one leg then the other. She washed down my legs with the last of the water in the bucket and went to refill it.

There she sat, immobile looking up at me. I could see the question she was asking herself was what happened next after my legs are washed? She had a strange expression on her face.

“What’s wrong?” I asked her.

She turned her head and looked away. “I don’t know what is wrong with me.” She held her hands out and looked down at them.

“How do you feel?”

“My hands are shaking ... and I don’t have any strength in my legs. And well,”

“Well, what?”

“I am dripping ...”

“Dripping?”

She paused “I am dripping between my legs.”

“That’s beautiful ...”

She looked up at me with a start. “What’s beautiful?”

“How you are ... it means that you are enjoying our bath together.”

She looked up at me with an expression that was some where between innocence and understanding. I marveled at her and tried to wonder how she felt. It had been such a long time since my first awakening that I had to think hard to remember even an inkling of my first release of sexual energy. As I thought this I could feel that warm feeling from within that tells all men that they are getting ready to procreate.

I smiled. It would not help things if both of us had weak knees and shaking hands. “Come,” I said to her, “sit here and I shall wash your back for you.”

Like a newly born doe she slowly gathered herself up, teetering a bit as she rose. I rushed to her side and offered her my hand to steady her. She took my hand in hers. Indeed she was unsteady and her hand was shaking. Indeed, there was sensuousness to what was streaming from her *source de vie*.

Together we walked over to the chair and she sat down on it. I gathered up the bucket and the soap and sponge and knelt down beside her. She looked over at me. I had not drawn my knees together so as to tease her a bit. She

looked down at between my legs. I could sense what she was thinking as I started to ever so gently to wash her back.

“I feel so silly ...” she said.

“I think it is wonderful ... to see you so happy.” I stopped washing her back for an instant. “I think it is wonderful you are so free.” She looked up at my face, giggled and turned away. I continued to wash her back.

There is something uniquely picturesque about a woman’s back, even a young woman’s back. It is the shape of the hips and the roundness of the backside, as well as that almost hourglass shape of the torso that drives many an artist crazy. Every artist who has tried to do justice to the picturesque nature of the female back has inevitably failed. It is so much easier for an artist to do justice to the picturesque nature of the female torso, with its landmarks of breasts and delta of Venus.

I thought of this as I stared at the nape of her neck and washed her back. When I had washed her thoroughly I poured the remnant of the water in the bucket down her back and stood up to get more water from the tub. She watched me as I walked to the tub and leaned over to fill the bucket. There was no way I could be modest with her.

When I returned to her I started washing her left arm. She covered her breasts with her right arm as I washed her left arm. When I shuffled to the other side she covered her breasts with her left arm as I washed her right

arm. I thought this odd until I realized that her nipples were very much erect.

“Isn’t this a wonderful feeling?” I said to her. She did not look at me. All she did was nod in rapid agreement. I got up and filled another bucket of water and when I returned to her I knelt down in front of her with my knees tightly together. She had her left arm across her breast and her right hand in her lap.

“Why don’t I leave you the soap and sponge and you can wash yourself.” I said this softly and with great kindness. I did not want her to feel pressured in any way.

When I said this she said nothing. Slowly she removed her arm from across her breasts. She wanted me to continue. Yes her nipples were quite erect. . Her arms were by her side gripping the chair. “I will be gentle” I said. And I was.

I poured some of the water down her left side and started to wash her left shoulder. Then I carefully lifted her left breast with my fingers and softly brought the sponge up to soap her. I passed the sponge just once ever so gently around her left breast before continuing to her right shoulder and her right breast. I was finished in under a minute. She left her arms by her side gripping the chair. I poured the water down her shoulders and her breasts.

The water spilled over her nipples like a water fall. There was a little water left in the bucket. I poured it down her right breast and across her right

nipple. She giggled. The cascade of water tickled her and so shrugged her shoulders left and right, causing her breasts to sway back and forth.

I looked at her face, which had become a deep crimson. “Would you like me to pour some more water over your breasts?” All she did was smile and so I obliged her. I got up, filled the bucket with water and returned. Then I slowly poured water across each of her breasts in turn, sensing that this was having a magical effect on her.

“This is very romantic,” I said, regretting I said this the moment the words left my lips. It was perhaps something best left unsaid.

She had closed her eyes. I notice her hands start to tremble. She was reaching a crisis. I wondered if I should stop teasing her with the water. I wondered if I should open her legs. I wondered if I should open mine ...

I did not have long to wonder for she suddenly let out a sigh and started to move her legs back and forth in agitation. I decided to be a scoundrel. I poured water from the bucket between her legs. It was as if I had lit the fuse to a stick of dynamite.

She leaned across and wrapped her arms around my neck. She started to shudder. I closed my legs and drew her towards me and she hugged me tightly with her legs as she came. I could feel the best of her against my stomach. Then she started to cry.

I held her tight and let her cry, which she did for several minutes. When she finally stopped crying her crisis had past and she started to loosen her hug on me.

I knew they had been tears of ecstasy, and tears of release ...

I placed my hands on her soft backside and stood up and slowly lifting her up with me. She felt so light and so fragile. As if I were carrying a new born babe. I walked over to the tub, being very careful not to slip on the wet brown tiled floor and then stepped into the hot tub. I settled her down on the bench and let go of her. She let go of me and I sat back opposite her so that all there was showing above the water were two heads.

The hot delicious water settled to a flat calmness.

She had the most remarkably happy and calm expression on her face, reflected in inverse by the water. Even in its reflection, her face was perfect – her round face, her blonde hair, her delicate features and her blue eyes. Her eyes sparkled in the light.

I smiled at her and she smiled at me.

It was the perfect moment.

We sat silently in the hot water, she now with her eyes closed and me looking at her intently. She was wetting her lips with her tongue. I glanced down and saw the reason why. She had her hands in her lap and I could see

she was slowly tickling her fancy with the fingers of her right hand. Her legs were somewhat apart and I could see her pink toe nails dance at the bottom of the tub. She was all of herself at that moment

Her legs started to sway, setting a bit of a wave in the tub. Not much of a wave, but just enough to make a rippling. A small wave splashed on her chin. She opened her eyes surprised and saw that I was watching her intently.

Her marvelously blue eye sparkled with life. “That was marvelous,” she said. ‘Let’s do it again!’”

“Do what?” I was intrigued as to what she thought we had just done.

“What we just did ...”

I shrugged my shoulders. They broke the surface of the water. They sent small waves across the surface to her, splashing her chin. She grinned at me, wolfishly.

“You know ...” she drew together her legs and her arms. This sent a much larger wave across the tub and splashed me in the face.

I splashed her back with my fingers. “Oh ... did it feel good?” I teased her.

“Did it ever!” She swayed her legs back and forth more vigorously. “Come on, let’s do it again.”

“I don’t know if we can.” I said this with a sigh. It was one thing to tease her to ecstasy, pouring water on her breasts and all, but it will be another thing if I were to seduce her. I don’t think I could do that without feeling some guilt. When I had arrived she had been wound up from her unrequited school dance and all I did was let her unwind herself, which she had done like one of those balsa wood airplanes with a wound up prop. She had flown high and fast, and then glided back to earth.

Now she was asking me to wind her right back up again. I didn’t think I should. I knew her well enough to know that her pleasures would grow exponentially if I gave her half a chance. She was a quiet, only child with suppressed emotions. I was giving her a chance to express those repressed emotions. If we got started her second ecstasy would greater over power her first ... the third her second ... and so on and so on. God forbid if I got her started. And how would I take my leave? But at the same time I wanted her to know that her first ecstasy would not be her last ... and that we could remain friends without complicating our lives.

“I don’t know,” I said again, but she was not going to let me off with just that. She lifted herself off the bench and thrust herself onto my lap. She did this so rapidly that I could not keep her from making herself comfortable on my lap. She put her arms around my neck. I put my hands on her hips. Her legs were spread and bent at the knees. I could feel her weight partly on my thighs.

Mere millimeters separated us. In the sloshing of the water in the tub there was the sloshing about of me and I could feel the best of me touch her, that softness of her that I had not felt before. Then the water stopped moving and the best of her hovered over the best of me. She leaned back and looked down at the two of us, at the maleness of me and the femaleness of herself. I watched her face as she experienced the feeling of the moment.

How does it feel?” She asked me.

“Huh?”

“How does it feel having one of those?” She motioned down with her eyes.

“I don’t know. I hardly give it any thought. How does it feel to have ... ?”

I looked down at her.

She giggled. “I don’t know.” She looked up at me and parroted back what I had just said, “I hardly give it any thought.” I smiled when she said this for I knew by the edge in her voice that she did give the best of her thought, and more often than she wanted to admit.

Without asking she reached down and took the best of me in her hand. Then she reached down further with her other hand and started to explore with her fingers. “I have seen drawings ... in my biology book... but never imagined it to be like this.

“It’s just soft tissue ...” I said to her, distracted. “Be careful ... I am fragile.” She held me with an open hand, caressing me with her little finger. It felt lush.

“How do you walk with that hanging between your legs?” She was looking down at me with rapture.

“You get use to it ...” It started to tickle so I guided her hands away from the best of me.

“What ... don’t you want me to ... ?” I was beginning to worry she would start to become too attached to me. I took my hands off her hips and placed my hands so that they were covering the best of me.

“I thought we were just having a bath together?”

“You are very shy, aren’t you!” She said, leaning forward as she said this. I nodded. I could feel the best of her on the back of my hand.

The back of my hand was pressed up against the top of her femininity and I could feel that indescribable place that is the centre of a woman’s arousal, pressed firmly between two of my knuckles. I fought the urge to touch her, instead letting her continue to take the lead for the both of us.

Maybe if I acted passively she would climb down from her arousal, I thought.

No such luck. It seemed the more passive I became the more active she acted out. She was, after all, on top of me.

She brought her legs together and pressed herself even more onto me. “Don’t you like me?” Evidently I wasn’t seducing her, she was the one now seducing me.

I nodded. Before I could stop her she was kissing me on the lips. It was a long and warm kiss. It was delicious. I did not fight her. Instead I moved my hands out of the way and let her press hard up against me. I wrapped my arms around her and held her close to me. She was so soft and so innocent.

It was another perfect moment. We both knew it.

Eventually she came up for air. By then I was fully aroused and she knew it. I could tell that so was she. It would have been so simple, there and now to lift her and set her atop me and then let her push herself down onto me. But I did not want this to happen. I did not want us to do anything that we might later regret.

Instead I moved my hand down to her and started to caress the small of her back, slowly and with the kindness of a child caressing a new born kitten. I caressed her unhurriedly and with deliberation, not wanting to arouse her more fully, but to let her feel the fullness of her arousal and to be comfortable in that fullness. On my stomach I could feel that she was engorged with her arousal.

But there was awkwardness to her, and I could tell she was not experienced in such things. I moved my hand slowly downwards, exploring the beauty of her. There was a tautness to her that led me to wonder whether she was still a virgin.

I looked into her face. It was flush. I found the courage to ask her. “You’re still a virgin aren’t you?”

She nodded her head. I stopped caressing her that very instant. She had suddenly become one of those priceless china figurines you pick up out of curiosity, only to realize that it was a unique piece of art and priceless, and worried about dropping it. And that inevitable fear that if you break it ... you then own it ...

“Please don’t stop.” She pleaded with me.

“I think I should ...” I wondered how fragile she was, deep down.

“But I don’t want you to.”

I looked at her for a moment speechless. What could I say to her? “The first time you make love should be with someone really special.”

“Like you ...” She was looking at me with her inviting big blue eyes.

“Like ... someone you love?” I said these words to her with great tenderness.

“I love you ...” She said earnestly. She placed her hands on my cheeks and kissed me. I did not doubt that she really felt love for me.

“The first time you make love should be with someone you truly love. A future boy friend ...”

“What’s wrong?” She had begun to sense my unease.

“Don’t you think that I am just a rebound?” I tried not to sound judgmental.

“A rebound?”

“From your rejection last night.” I tried to be gentle with her as I said this.

She shook her head, “no ... you are definitely not a rebound ...” There was softness around her eyes. “I have felt love for you since we first met.”

I paused for a moment and studied her face. She was being sincere with me. You could see that. What she was saying was not of this moment, but from this era in her life, and era that started when we have first met some months back.

“You must have found it hard ...” I was curious.

“Hard?”

“To hold this feeling of love inside of you.”

She nodded, biting her lip. I kissed her on the cheek to show her I understood. There was then an awkward silence between us,

“Can I tell you something?” I peered deep into her eyes.

“Yes ... what?”

“I married my wife on a rebound ... I hadn’t realized at the time but I was emotionally vulnerable. She took advantage of that. It was a giant mistake.”

“A rebound from what?”

“I had been in love with another woman and well that other woman put her career as a doctor before anything else ... which broke my heart. Then out of the blue my friend the doctor asked me to marry her, but my heart had already been shattered into a million pieces. I was emotionally vulnerable when I later married ... on the rebound. And what a bounce!”

“What are you saying?” There was sadness to her words.

I looked her earnestly in the eye. “At this moment in your life you are emotionally vulnerable ...”

“Emotionally vulnerable?”

I nodded. “I don’t want us to do anything that you will later regret.”

“Like ... what?”

“Like have sex ...”

She pulled me closer and said “I want to ...”

“I don’t want to bring you hurt. Nor do I want to take advantage of your emotional vulnerability ... I think I should be going ...” I let my body relax as I said this. She felt my body relax.

“Don’t you want to have sex with me?” She was almost pleading with me.

I shook my head. “It would not be right ...”

“Are you scared?” She was glaring sternly at me as she said this.

I nodded, ‘but not for me. I am scared for you.’

“For me?”

“Let us say we have sex together ... then what? What happens when I leave today? You will be alone, more alone then when you asked me to come and see you. Do you understand what I am saying?”

She shook her head.

“I will try to explain.” I looked up at her and tried my best to choose my words carefully. I did not want to hurt her feelings, nor did I want to lead her astray. “Lust is a very powerful emotion. But it is not love. I would rather sit here with you together in this tub and enjoy the love that two friends can share then to ruin that love with lust. Do you know what I am saying?.”

“Do you love me?”

I nodded and kissed her on the cheek. “I do love you ... as a friend ...”

“I love you too ...” she said this with tears in her eyes.

I carefully continued on. “Being here with you today is a very special moment. It would be ruined if we were to have sex together. Sex can only get into the way of our friendship. I don’t want to bring you pain ...

“Pain?”

“The first time ... would be painful ...”

“Oh ... yes.” She understood what I was saying.

“As your friend I want to bring you happiness.” I hugged her. “Are you happy?”

“Yes ... I am ... very happy. ”

“So am I.” I let out a sigh. “This is beautiful, being here with you. I wish time could stand still ... but I think it is time I must go.”

“Stay ... stay a little longer.” She pleaded with me.

“It is getting near noon.” I did not say this with much conviction.

“Wait a minute ...” She surprised me by lifting herself out of the tub and dashing out of the room. “I’ll be right back.” She did not even wrap herself in a towel.

I stood up and climbed out of the tub. Maybe she needed to take a pee? I thought. I walked over to the towels, grabbed one and started to dry myself off. I started with my arms and then my legs and by the time I was drying my torso she had returned.

I was surprised. She was carrying a Polaroid camera. She lifted the camera to her eye and I put my hand up covering the lens with my hand. “No. I don’t think it is a good idea to take my picture. What do you want a picture for?”

She lowered the camera. “To remember this moment ... will you take a picture of me then?”

I looked at her and then smiled. I looked around the room . “Let me take a picture of you behind the frosted glass.” She peered over at the frosted glass and nodded. She handed me the camera and then went and stood behind the frosted glass.

“If you lean against the glass, that would be perfect. Just your hands and your breasts,” I said to her. She did just that.

I took two pictures and then called over from behind the frosted glass. I gave her the camera and the two Polaroid snaps.



I picked up a towel and began to dry her back, as she watched the snaps developed. She looked over her shoulder at me. “This is beautiful!” she said. I nodded.

I started to dry her arms then her legs. Then she turned around and I tenderly dried the front of her, beginning with her shoulders and the softness of her breasts, and even that soft and delicate place between her legs. She stood there in front of me, bold and beautiful.

When I was done she took my towel and finished drying me, with the same trust and tenderness. As she dried me off she took her time to admire the beauty of me.

When she finished I wrapped her in a towel and then I started to dress, putting all my clothes back on except my socks, which I knew would get wet on the cold wet floor.

Then she took my hand and we walked up the stairs together.

When we got to the top of the stairs she turned to me and said, “you are right ...”

“Right, about what ...” I stopped to look at her.

“About love ...” she leaned over and kissed my cheek” and happiness ... being what friends should feel towards each other.”

I kissed her on her cheek in return, and we both walked over to the kitchen. When we got there I wrapped her in her robe and sat to put on my socks. I asked her to show me the pictures.

The first one was a bit blurred, but the second one turned out perfectly. “Wow, look how beautiful you are! It is the Perfect Picture ... ”

“Would you like the pictures?” She offered both of them to me.

I shook my head. “You keep them ... in a safe place.”

She giggled. “Can we do this again?” she asked me.

I shrugged my shoulders, for I honestly did not know what to say.

I stood up, walked over to the coffee machine and poured her a cup of coffee then pulled a chair back from the table for her and sat her down. I handed her the cup of coffee and then leaned down to kiss her on the forehead. She looked up at me and had tears in her eyes.

“Yes we can,” is all I said as I put on my jacket and walked myself to the front door, and let myself out. My outside world held a certain harshness that day, while my inside world held the warmth that only love and happiness could bring a person.

As I looked back at her house I knew for certain she felt the same way.

Remembering the Best of Her

In the background the radio was playing Debussy's *Claire de Lune*. It was just the thing he needed to calm him down.

He sat and ate his morning toast, forcing it down with a gulp of tepid, stale coffee. He had run out of strawberry jam and had forgotten to pick up butter when he was last at the grocers. Well, honestly he couldn't afford either jam or butter, and the bread had that very morning been baked by his bighearted neighbor. The smell of fresh bread, now toast, was a welcomed and comforting one for him. The small generosityes of his few friends were what were keeping him alive.

The old, lonely Polish lady next door was kind to him, treating him as if he was her only son. She spent much of her day in the kitchen baking for her family and friends. She had two daughters, both in their thirties, both happily married, and a bevy of young grand children. She was a widow. Her husband had died in a coal mine accident back in Poland when her daughters were two and four. But that was a world and life time ago for her. She now lived in her small and simple apartment in Vancouver, never too far from her family and friends. Life was kind to her and she was kind to him in return.

He was proud but not too proud to accept her small generosityes. The larger generosityes he did have to refuse. At times she was just too lonely, and just too generous. She was old enough to be his mother. For the last few weeks, when he could afford it, he would bring her a bottle of Polish potato vodka

and together they would eat and drink the night away: Borscht, periogi, lump fish caviar on freshly baked bread, smoked white fish, and poppy seed cake with Chickory coffee for desert. What is the expression ... the surest way to a man's heart is through his stomach.

This morning his stomach ached. She had warm grey eyes, and a bosom that was very Slavic. But luckily he did not have far to stagger home after their frivolities, otherwise things would get more complicated than they are. He had grown to like potato vodka, but not as much as she does, naturally. In return, he promised her that one day he would write her life story, as she told it. He drew the line at doing his laundry. He was not too proud. Somehow the whole neighbor thing made him feel like he was living his life in a Bukowski poem.

The old wire mesh electric fan on his desk whirled hither and thither, blowing hot arid air through his hair and across his desk. A sudden glare caught his eye. He looked up and out his window. Cars were passing in the street below. Outside the midday sun was melting the tar patching up the road. He thought enough to remind himself not to walk on the patches, if he was mad enough to venture out into the midday sun.

He turned back to his writing. He thought himself as good as Hemingway or Fitzgerald, but no one published his short stories, and as a result no one was there to read them: *The Black Mask*, *Today and Tomorrow*, *A Secret Love*. ... these were his priceless manuscripts gathering dust on the corner of his desk, lost beneath a growing pile of rejection letters. Why did he bother? Maybe if he was living a bug's life in far off Paris with her, then they would

compare him to Henry Miller. But then he would have to be a lecher, as well. He heard his Polish neighbor signing through the wall. Does he have to go half way around the world to live such a life? He turned the volume of the radio up, but not too much.

As he wrote about love he sat back in his chair remembering his French girl friend. He remembered oh so many things about her. She was like a strange liqueur to him. He had never known anyone remotely like her. Sure, he had known and loved other woman, but in her arms he was just a little boy, and she knew it. It was as if he had been a virgin and she, his awakening to life. What is it about *Les Parisiennes*?

They had spent more time in bed together than doing anything else, except perhaps sitting in the bath and sharing poetry. He sat farther back in his old oak chair and stared out into space as he remembered the poetry she had recounted, and had translated for him. The chair creaked ominously under the tension of him.

Her reciting of French poetry had been Baudelaire, always Baudelaire:

*Au pays parfumé que le soleil caresse,
J'ai connu sous un dais d'arbres toute empourprés
Et de palmiers d'où pleut sur les yeux la paresse,
Une dame Creole aux charmes ignorés.*

In that perfumed country caressed by the sun,
I have known, under a canopy of purple trees

And palm raining idleness upon the eyes,
A Creole lady of private beauty.

*Son teint est pâle et chaud; la brune enchanteresse
A dans le col des airs noblemen manières;
Grande et svelte en marchant comme une chasseresses,
Son sourire est tranquille et ses yeux assures.*

Her shade is pale and warm; this brown enchantress
Has gracefully mannered airs to herself;
Large and sinuous, walking like a huntress,
Her smile is silent and her eyes secure.

*Si vous allies, Madame, au vrai pays de gloire,
Sur le bords de la Seine ou de la verte Loire,
Belle digne d'orner les antiques manoirs,*

If you should go, Madam, to the true country of glory,
On the banks of the Seine or of the green Loire,
Fair lady fit to decorate ancient mansions,

*Vous feriez, à l'abri des ombreuses retriates,
Germer mille sonnets dans le Coeur des poètes,
Que vos grandes yeux rendraient plus soumis que vos noirs.*

In some shady and secluded refuge, you would awake
A thousand sonnets in the hearts of poets,

Whom your great eyes would make more subject than your darkness.

He missed her oh so much ... some mornings more than others. He had slept alone last night, once again dreaming about her all night long. When he woke up he was nearly bent out of shape. He remembered her beauty, her bounties, and the way she slept next to him, so close, so fragile and so innocent. They had been together for three, and now had been apart for six months.

Outside a car honked his horn, breaking his train of thought. Damn!

He reached for another piece of toast and let the crumbs fall where they may. He looked down at his old white cotton shirt was stained with wear, and heavy with perspiration. He did not bother to brush the crumbs off. The fan would do that on its next pass. The old fan rattled its agreement. If he could afford it he would smoke, what writer doesn't. But his asthma saved him from the price of that vice, and so it was to bad coffee, and solitude that he turned. Besides, the air was so thick with smoke from the forest fires that he didn't need to puff any cigarettes. A million acres had already been turned to ash this fire season, and they anticipated another million had yet to burn. By the taste of the smoke he knew whether it had come from the interior, or had drifted up from Washington State. The cedar smell told him the wind was blowing north.

Debussy was finished and now the news was droning in over the radio.

Far off in Paris another bomb had gone off killing seven British tourists on a tour bus. The youngest, a boy of seven was on his first trip to the continent, had died at the scene.

There were also more dead children in the civil war in Syria. Why they would call such a thing civil boggled his mind.

In Germany a mosque had been burned to the ground. In Stockholm three women had been raped overnight by roving gangs of street people. The Government was calling for a review of its immigration policies.

The banking system in Moscow had had another melt down for the second day in a row because of the *Shadow Gang*, or someone claiming to be them. It was reported that four hundred million rubles had gone missing. Another half million computers were stuck up with ransomware.

Bit Coins were trading at \$ 1,750 apiece and worth more than gold or platinum. Some Russian hacker had been arrested in Greece for laundering \$ 3 billion worth of Bit Coins. Both the Russians and the Americans were fighting for his extradition. Supposedly he had embezzled \$ 11,000 out of a bank account in Russian.

He smiled to himself. If only he had listened to Hairy Pot Head and bought into Bit Coin, when he had a chance.

The fast paced card game in Washington was Trump – no one knew the rules and jokers were wild. Martinets danced in Ottawa. The government

had fallen in Victoria, on Vancouver Island, and there was a new Premier in British Columbia.

He leaned back in his chair and reached over with the tips of his outstretched fingers to change the channel on the radio. He was depressed enough and didn't need any more bad news.

He turned back to his writing and took another gulp of his tepid, stale coffee. It was instant coffee – *Nescafe* – all the packets he could snag at the unemployment office when no one was looking. The packets of raw brown sugar that lay on the desk next to the coffee had been pilfered last Monday when his publisher took him for lunch to give him the bad news. No to *Today and Tomorrow*. But if he put more wanton sex into *A Secret Love* there might be a chance yet for that manuscript to get published.

But he was a writer, damn it. Like Hemingway and Fitzgerald, he refused to use words like f@#k and c\$%t in his writing. He was no Henry Miller and so, it was going to be a long, dry summer for him. He was just not cut up to be a bug'r and he wasn't going to write no brain fungus. If his readers could not understand the meanings of words such as *the best of her*, they could go fuddle themselves.

He remembered the last time they had slept together, before she packed her bags to fly home. She had exhausted him. Her student visa had expired, and she said she was forced to return to Paris. She wasn't all that happy about returning home. He had suspected her year in Vancouver was to escape some unhappiness that perhaps a year abroad could push away. He had

wanted to ask her about it, but didn't have the courage and in the end figured they didn't know each other well enough. He was sad to see her go, and was so desperate to keep her that the morning she was to leave he had proposed to her.

But she had laughed at him, right to his face, and said no –“ we are wonderful lovers, but we are not meant to be together forever, to live together – that would destroy our love.” Besides, she said that she missed a good baguette. You couldn't find any good baguettes in Vancouver. The only thing that Vancouver could produce, she said, were stale donuts, and bagels with onions, and poppy seeds ... dégueulasse. He had had to look the word up and were it not for the fact he loved her he would have taken her to task for such disparagement. He remembered her grin as she said this. Coming from Paris, Vancouver felt like the backside of the moon to her. She could be honest with him, brutally honest at times, hiding behind her mysterious and all knowing Parisienne smile.

She had had the same grin on her face as they sat in the bath tub together the night before she left, when she recounted Baudelaire's poem *Le Chat*. As this moment came to mind from the tips of his toes to the tips of his fingers, a terrible surge of longing rushed through him:

*Viens, mon beau chat, sur mon Coeur amoureux;
Retiens les griffes de ta patte,
Et laisse-moi plonger dans tes beaux yeux,
Mêlés de métal et d'agate.*

My beautiful cat, come onto my heart full of love,
Hold back the claws of your paw,
And let me plunge into your adorable eyes,
Mixed with metal and agate.

*Lorsque mes doigts caressent a loisir
Ta tête et ton dos elastique,
Et que ma main s'envivre du plaisir,
De palper ton corps électrique.*

When my fingers lazily fondle
Your head and your elastic back,
And my hand gets drunk with the pleasure
Of feeling your electric body,

*Je vois ma femme en esprit. Son regard,
Comme le tien, amiable bête,
Profound et froid, coupe et fend comme un dard.*

I see in spirit my personal lady. Her glance,
Like yours, dear creature,
Deep and cold, slits and splits like a dart.

*Et, des pieds jusques a la tête,
Un air subtil, un dangereux parfum,
Nagent autour de son corps brun.*

And from her feet to her head,
A subtle atmosphere, a dangerous perfume,
Swim around her brown body.

Then the following morning she was gone.

Yes they wrote to each other ... for awhile ... but the letters became less intimate, and they arrived more and more days apart, until eventually they stopped arriving altogether. He had heard from a friend of her friend that she had stumbled upon some lonely and rich Parisian fellow twice her age, had gotten pregnant by him, and they had been quickly married. She couldn't be happy, he thought, but she had always put her comfort before her happiness, and would probably do good by her new life. In the months that she had been with him, she had lived a free and easy life, while he toiled. Maybe that was her nature.

Maybe that is how she seemed to stay young and so innocent, while, at least innocent in the sense of Anais Nin. It was some weeks after she left that he realized how much she actually looked like Nin, when he had stumbled on a picture of her on a book dust cover. Maybe that was what first attracted him to her. They had met at a party of a mutual friend, each coming with someone else, and then leaving together. It had seemed so natural to be together. That very night they entered the gates of paradise together and so started three months of bliss. Now she was gone. At the time it didn't seem to him that she was taking advantage of him.

This morning he was sadder than usual. Sad because even his publisher thought *The Delta of Venus* and *Anais Nin* were mere cocktails. His publisher couldn't see it – good writing didn't sell – only *Fifty Shades* and garbage like that. “Gratuitous sex and bondage sells, romantic short stories don't. You have to stick it in the reader and twist it,” he had said over his Potato Latka, sour cream and caviar, “otherwise they don't feel it.” And he wasn't talking about a knife. He had nearly choked on his eggs benny as he sat there in disbelief. Was he caught in some Hollywood nightmare? Was it not time for him to find another publisher? It wasn't enough for him to be taken for the occasional free lunch. It wasn't enough to be lectured on what sells and what doesn't. He didn't care about the perversities of the modern consumer. All he wanted was his short stories to be published.

If she was here, she would understand him, and he would be able to survive this misfortunes. Love triumphs all. But he had loved, and had lost her. She was gone for good, sitting on some park bench in some quiet corner of Paris breast feeding a little baby boy that looked very much like his father. He felt so jealous!

And to make matters more disappointing for him, last Friday some patrons of Letters and Arts had come across *Pen and Pencil Magazine* that he and a few of his writer friends had struggled so hard to establish on the net. They hacked, trolled and trashed it because it was good, and they were not. Maybe it was the piece he had written about there not being any modern day Russian authors worth a good read, and that Tolstoy was stale beyond any hope.

He coughed and looked out the window. The wind had picked up and the smoke was being blown about. Yes, it was going to be a very, very long hot summer.

He had missed putting in his rent check for July by just a day, and had to scramble about to make sure there was enough money in the bank. You borrow until you need to beg. But what will come after the begging? His family and close friends had all but given up on him. Now that she was gone, I guess, even she did. That's why she left him. Didn't he once read that Henry Miller manage to survive a debt of \$ 28,000, before he became a well known writer. Hell, if Henry Miller could manage to carry a debt and pay the rent, so could he. He wasn't an American down and out in Paris, was he?

He had had to hock his laptop and now he was sitting at his desk writing with pen and paper at hand. At least he remembered to double space his manuscripts. And I guess opening an old dictionary from time to time wouldn't do him much harm. He was a writer after all, and writers like all artists were meant to suffer. It is through their suffering that they become great. He smirked. Who was it that had said that great writers only become famous after they are dead, and that parasites can get rich off of them, while the literary critics pick at their dead bones.

Almost on queue Dvorak's Largo from his *New World Symphony* is playing on the radio. Don't give up, he thought!

His latest rejection was typical. The call had *Hope* as a theme and what does he do but write a short submission, *I Hope to be Read and Remembered*:

“Every day I sit to write a few hundred words hoping that I would be read and remembered. I am not married, except perhaps to my writing, and don’t have offspring, unless you count *mes oeuvres*. I am of the age where my urge to procreate has long dried out.

I write poetry, prose, as well as some science and math. More people read my science and math than my other manifestations. Maybe it is because I exist in my world of the *Mathematical Bohemian* and not that of the poetic or proselytic. Seen through my eyes, the world has a different meaning. I am more of an Einsteinean than a Kardashian.

Perhaps a hundred years from now, many decades after I am gone, I will be read and remembered, but maybe not for my science and math. Maybe a thousand years hence the curious will discover my poetry and prose and wondered why he died a poor and forgotten man.

Or, maybe in the end my science and math will have made the world a better place. Is there such a thing as mathematical justice?

I can only hope. “

The irony is, of course, that he had submitted the piece on a Monday morning and it was rejected that very afternoon.

If only they were truthful. If only they could enjoy these cold, homespun stories of life that are real, and honest, and not the make believe or *fantagorical*. Perhaps it was the underlying humor of his stories they didn't get.

These were stories about Hairy Pot Head who was always so stoned that he could not keep down a job. Yet, somehow, he always had money. These were stories about his younger sister who foolishly spent the best years of her life, and most of her meager inheritance, either helping Hairy out of his many troubles, or was studying psychology and contemporary writing at UBC. She was now a barista at Starbucks during the day, from 8 to 5, seven days each week and a struggling single mom at night with a four year old with Asperger's, a love child that was the consequence of her falling in with her flaky creative writing instructor, who she thought would give her an A if only she opened herself up to his *creative impulses*. Up until then she had been a good girl. After all her name was Virginia.

He was now the head of the Department of Contemporary Writing at UBC, and married to his second wife. He divorced his first wife when she tried to run Virginia and their six month old baby over as they all three of them were walking across Robson Street one pleasant autumn morning. Why hadn't he marry Virginia, instead of some young floozy?

He wrote on. He knew Virginia, and loved both her and her baby, but was too poor to help her out, and too proud to let her help him out. Yet, when either was lonely they would share an evening together, but not the way you think they would. She would let him wash her back as she read his latest

writing. She thought he was really good, as both a man and a writer. But sadly, the bastard had given her more than just a child, but something simplex as well. It tore his heart that he had to go out of his way to keep Virginia's honest life from finding the printer's ink.

Yes, his stories were real, cold and homespun. But was there any room for him under the sun? Maybe, she said, he should move to New York City, and get away from this place. Flee to the other end of the continent. Start anew. That is where the real publishers are. At least there, there are different pretenses.

It's not that Canadians don't have deep convictions, about important things like donuts and hockey, it's just that these fall into that unfathomable, hollowness of the place, a place where ignorance is bliss and well, people are their own follies.

Do they want big men here in Canada? Do they want them cultured? What is cultured? He knew that the only culture they have in Vancouver is at the grocer's, in the imported cheese isle, there among the Limburger, Gorgonzola, Stilton and Brie. It has been years since he enjoyed a good stout and unpasteurized Stilton. How it really works here In Vancouver, the antipode of the cultured world, is that if you say something over and over, like ... *cannabis is good for you* ... then you cultivate brain fungus. Yea to Hairy Pot Head! As he sat there it finally dawned on him why ol' Pot Head always seemed to have a few dollars in his pocket, and always in increments of thirty dollars ... never less than two forty at the end of the month, but never more than four twenty.

When does the Amtrak leave, Virginia asked him last night? Maybe Portland, in Oregon? Just anywhere but here. Missed today's 150th. He had no reason to celebrate Canada's Birthday. He didn't recognize this country anymore as being his Canada. Here they paid the librarians more than the writers and wondered why there are no good Canadian authors. Maybe there are a few good librarians. And besides he preferred the earnestness of Hemingway, to the mopiness of Munro any day. Hell, he had even started to enjoy *The History of the English Speaking Peoples* by Winston Churchill. After all they had given him a Nobel Prize in Literature for his writing.

He crunched hard on the final bit of toast, a piece of dried out crust. It stuck in his throat and he began to choke. He picked up the nearly empty cup of coffee to wash it down. As he finished the cup some drops of coffee dribbled down his chin and onto his white cotton shirt. This didn't bother him. He had been sitting for too long and he had hit a dry spell in his writing.

He pulled the shirt off over his head. Then he got up to pour himself a cold bath. There was not much else he could do in the middle of a hot day like today, Saturday July 1st.

He would go into town tomorrow July 2nd and poke around a bit. He enjoyed Sundays the most, when the streets of Vancouver were empty and when they still rang church bells to summon the devout to the Catholic Cathedral. Maybe he would even go to church and pray for his deliverance. Miracles sometime happen.

Virginia had taken him to church a few weeks back. When he sat beside her on that hard wooden pew life had seemed almost perfect. People looked at the three of them, mother, child and him as if they belonged together. As he sat next to her and thought about all she had been through, and about all that she would endure he knew he could not leave her to her own solitary efforts. Struggle as they might through life he would not abandon his friend, and her son. Then from the very depths of his remembrances came a few words that he once read in D. H. Lawrence's *The Rainbow* about Anna Victrix: The Church talked about her soul, about the welfare of mankind, as if the saving of her soul lay in her performing certain acts conducive to the welfare of mankind. Well and good – it was so, then.”

That very evening he sat to write something special:

“Why I Write

There are perhaps three main reasons why I write and these reasons are a true, dear and clear reflection of my beliefs. I write to pursue truth, virtue and understanding.

I cannot claim that writing has been in my blood since I was very young, however I can claim that I have become a mature writer by reading the fine works of others and contemplating the truths, virtues and understanding they have shared with the world.

In the pursuit of truth there is that dichotomy that Immanuel Kant expressed, which I paraphrase ... *“two things fill the mind with ever increasing wonder and awe ... the starry heavens above us and the moral laws within us.”*

It is not a pure awe that truth requires of us but instead an impersonal and practical one that is set in our efforts to understand the physical laws that governs to the far corners of the universe in which we reside, as well as the moral laws that govern our actions, we mere baubles in the starry heavens.

Those corners of the universe can be to the very large, the scale of galaxies and the universe itself, or it might be the corners set out in the other direction, that where quarks and leptons reside and quanta is the norm. As we well know, given the advances in modern science, these two limits, the very large and the very small, are directly coupled to one another, borrowing a mathematical concept from particle physics. And we too, organic machines made of organic materials, are delicately coupled in at the middle of the universal scale of distances.

What of the moral laws and how they pertain to virtue? I am Catholic and bring to my life a Catholic sensibility. The world seems a far more sinister place than two decades ago. While the Cold War is deemed over, the world has become even more lawless and many more millions suffer today the inequities of war and oppression than in the past. The United Nations count the suffering numbers at 65

million, numbers greater than at any time since the end of the Second World War, with 100 million more suffering from famine and a lack of clean, potable water.

I write to express my Catholic sensibilities to lend aid to those who suffer and to encourage those who govern to do more to alleviate their suffering.

In the pursuit of understanding I reflect to a large degree the sensibilities of Albert Einstein in that this understanding does not deem us the centre of the universe, but a minuscule part of it, with a clear understanding of our limitations and possibilities. It was he who reminded us that, “*once you stop learning ... you start dying.*” Is it possible that the troubled heart of our civilization has already begun to wither and fade?

Every moment is precious, all of our words and actions meaningful, if we decide to make them so. “

And to his great joy his little bit of truth was accepted to be published and all hope was restored. Virginia had hugged him, and kissed him and cried for him, and told him her prayers had been answered. Miracles do happen!

Then he grabbed the library book he had borrowed last week and turned to the final few pages of Hammett’s *The Thin Man*. Maybe he would find out who did it, before he fell asleep in the bath. He also snagged the last of the Pernod and didn’t even bother to pour it in a glass. *La Parisienne* would be

horrified that he was just going to drink it right out of the bottle. Before he had met her he had no idea what *Pernod* was. He didn't even drink beer. Now look at him!

He left the fan to blow on. On the radio Rodrigo's Adagio from *Concierto de Aranjuez* was just in its beginnings. Hell ... everything about today was reminding him of her. The first time they had made love in the afternoon Rodrigo had been playing on the radio.

No matter, he had to escape this heat and that meant a cold bath.

He saw the tap on the sink was dripping, but he didn't care. Let it drip! He took off the last of his things and left them fall at his feet. Just before he stepped into the bath he looked up at himself in the old French silvered mirror over the sink. If I am made in God's image, he thought, God must have a sense of humor. He stepped into the bath, settled in, and let the cold water find every part of him. The feeling, although somewhat uncomfortable, was a feeling nonetheless.

He opened *The Novels of ...* to page 691. How did Dashiell Hammett make it through life, he thought. He smiled as he read Nora's words to her husband Nick: "*Tell me something, Nick. Tell me the truth: when you were wrestling with Mimi, didn't you have an erection?*"

"*Oh a little,*" Nick responded.

The e-word forced him back to the same place, but at a happier time. He remembered the first time they had shared a bath together. She had whispered her first Baudelaire poem into his ear:

*La Nature est un temple où de vivants pilliers
Laissent parfois sortir de confuses paroles;
L'homme y passe à travers des forêts de symboles
Qui l'observent avec des regards familiers.*

Nature is a temple where living pillars
Let sometime emerge confused words;
Man crosses it through forests of symbols
Which watch him with intimate eyes.

Her breasts had become fuller and her nipples had come alive as she whispered into his ears.

*Comme de longs échos qui de loin se confondent
Dans une ténébreuse et profonde unité,
Vaste comme la nuit et comme la clarté,
Les parfums, les couleurs et les sons se répondent.*

Like those deep echoes that meet from afar
In a dark and profound harmony,
As vast as night and clarity,
So perfumes, colours, tones answer each other.

He had looked down at the bright crucifix and gold chain around her neck.
A flush had passed across her body so that it had the red glow of the morning sky.

*Il est des parfums frais comme des chairs d'enfants,
Doux comme les hautbois, verts comme les prairies,
Et d'autres, corrompus, riches et triomphants,*

There are perfumes fresh as children's flesh,
Soft as grass, green as meadows,
And others, corrupted, rich, triumphant,

She had leaned back to kiss him. They had both begun to tremble together.
Goose bumps appeared all over her body. Yes God had created woman after man after learning from her mistakes. And she had won an award for the creation of woman. For an instant, time had stopped ...

*Ayant l'expansion des choses infinies,
Comme l'ambre, le musc, le benjoin et l'encens,
Qui chantent les transports de l'esprit et des sens.*

Possessing the diffusion of infinite things,
Like amber, musk, incense and aromatic resin,
Chanting the ecstasies of spirit and senses.

The ecstasies of spirit eh ... He smirked and took a good swig of Pernod, which warmed his insides. There he was, cold on the outside he thought, but warm on the inside. Maybe that is how real life was meant to be.

His wiggled his toes that poked up from the far end of the bath tub. Small waves passed along the surface of the water, refracting the sunlight streaming in from the little window above him. He looked up, out of the window, and could just make out a tiny patch of blue sky. He took the last swig of Pernod. Maybe the smoke was clearing up? He felt light headed.

That little glimpse of blue sky seemed to cheer him up. He now knew how best to finish the short story he was writing. Something about blue sky, and hope ... If I stop writing I can no longer be me.

As he lay back in his cold bath remembering her, he had all but forgotten Nick and Nora. He looked past the book, past the words, at the best of him poking up out of the water and smiled. Was life really about remembering the best of her?

He dashed Hammett down onto the bathroom floor, splashing bath water all about, and watched with some fascination as the dry pages soaked up the water off the floor. Tonight he will drink too much vodka and tomorrow morning he will go to Church with Virginia and her son.

Well ... real life does do a man good.

Penelope and Her Predicament

It was a hot August afternoon and I was on my way home after a long and trying workday. In fact it had been a long and trying week and I could not get home fast enough. I longed for the quiet and clam solitude of my studio apartment, where I had my books and my classical music, my easel, and my canvases, paints and brushes waiting quietly for me. While every day was an adventure for me, there was still no place like home.

It was on the number 2 bus that I first met Penelope and come to learn about her predicament. She was already on the bus when I stepped on. As I paid my fare, with coin of the realm, I hardly noticed her sitting comfortably draped across that special, lonely seat just behind the bus driver. I took the empty seat across the aisle from her, setting my burdens down on the island next to me. Every day as I trudged to and from work I carried my laptop computer in its case over one shoulder, and a bag with books over the other, in a balanced sort of way. As the bus pulled away from the curb I nearly fell over and tumbled into my seat.

It was then that she noticed me. With my green hat, my alpenstock and my Harris Tweed jacket I looked very much a gentleman. The cane was just in case my old back gave out, which it does from time to time because of an ol' war wound.

I was once a quick and nimble naval officer with the Royal Canadian Navy, the youngest naval officer in Canada, until I did a number on my neck and back helping to save the life of a young and foolish officer cadet while

aboard one of Her Majesty's Canadian Ships. That was a generation ago, while at sea in a far different world dominated by a long forgotten Cold War between superpowers. Even today, though, once a gentleman always a gentleman.

Today I had a much easier job of things, and had been on a short working stint across town. Almost every day this week, traveling to and from my work on the number 2 bus, I met interesting people and enjoyed watching the small dramas of a big Canadian city unfold around me. If I were studying to take a Ph.D. in psychology I could probably do all my research on the buses of Vancouver, perhaps starting with this bus.

The people I met on the number 2 could very well be the control group for my research. The people on this bus were kind and cultured and rather nice to chat with. They lived in one of the more affluent corners of Vancouver, and you could see that in many of the little details, how they were dressed and how they acted. Many were going to and from University, but I will not hold that against them.

There were, of course, less wholesome buses trekking about Vancouver, such as through the Downtown East Side, and along East Hastings. Studying people aboard these buses would make for an even more fascinating adventure. However, I lack the courage for they are scary to be on even in the full light of day. At night they are nightmares. I found that out last year as I made a dash through the Downtown East Side after visiting some artist friends in the studio near Commercial Street. Frankly, even as a ol' naval officer I did not feel all that safe on those east side buses. I was

more than content where I was, traveling on the west side of town in the full light of day, on the number 2 bus going downtown.

She was sitting cross wise on that special, lonely seat and seemed quite agitated. Out of the corner of my eye I noticed she glanced at me a second time. Perhaps she wondered if I had taken notice of her, or perhaps she was worried that I could make out what she was saying on her cell phone. Indeed I had, and could sort of make out her conversation, and so without looking at her I smiled. It was my message of kindness to her. Instinctively I knew she needed kindness. Her body language told me so.

She seemed to be in a sad and dark place. I wondered why. Why should someone as young as her be burdened with unhappiness? What dark games were being played out in her life? What dark secrets lay hidden away in her heart? She noticed my smile and rocked a tiny bit in her seat, almost in the way of acknowledgment.

She was in the throw of a fervent conversation with someone. For me it was a one-sided conversation because I could only hear what she was saying, but I could tell she was talking with a boy. Her boy friend, perhaps? Her voice carried an edge to it. She said “You never should have done it.” When she said this I instinctively felt a dark and sinister meaning to her words and looked at her. She hissed into her phone “you’re a pig!” I smirked for I knew that the slang meaning for ‘*pig*’ was a *pretty insensitive guy*. I glanced over at her. Her face was fixed with a fierce determination. At that moment she was in a world of her own and so I took the opportunity to study her.

She had long blonde hair that spilled over her shoulders and went down to the small of her back. She had lovely blue eyes and marvelous long natural eye lashes. She had long legs, perhaps that of a ballerina or gymnast I thought, for her feet in her beach sandals showed a bit of rough wear and tear. Although summer was nearly over it appeared that she only had the beginnings of a beach tan. This told me that she had not spent all that much time in leisure in the sun. She wore a pink cotton blouse with a giant outline of a heart on it in bright yellow. It was the sort of shirt an unattached aunt might give to a favorite niece her age. The blouse barely covered her bosom and just a tad bit more, leaving her midriff visible. A faint ornate shadow told the curious perhaps she wore nothing under her blouse.

Her belly button was visible for all the world to see. It was oblong and asymmetric, with a dimple at the top and a shadow at the bottom, and was something very intimate and very feminine. Thankfully her belly button did not have one of those tawdry little sparkling trinkets that concubines and narcissi hang from them. Her ears were also unadorned and I think they had not even been pierced. From where I sat I could tell her skin still had that silkiness of a girl not yet ravaged by puberty. Her face was still rounded and not angular. It was rosy, perhaps from a bit of sun, or from the stimulation she was experiencing from her tiff over the telephone.

Down below she wore pale blue, well worn, *Daisy Dukes* that plunged to a V in the front that barely covered her most intimate place. *Daisy Dukes* are a pair of cutoffs that does not leave much to the imagination. In her case it didn't. There is a certain age in life when young women can wear *Daisy Dukes* with a sort of civil acceptance, and her as yet fully blossomed bosom

said she was still of that age. She was of that awkward age where she was no longer a mere child and not yet a fully grown woman, but nonetheless reminded periodically that full womanhood would be soon upon her. As the fullness of her was being revealed one facet at a time, I could tell that life was being kind to her.

She continued to argue with her friend. “Ha,” she hollered into her phone. I glanced away. “Don’t you wish!” This was real drama. I listened more intently. As her voice became more and more agitated, out of the corner of my eye I could see she started to swing her legs to and fro in ever increasing arcs. I don’t think she was really consciously thinking about where she was and what she was doing.

I don’t know what got me to look back, perhaps human curiosity, but for a split second I glanced back at the peak of an arc. I could feel my face blush as the splendor of life revealed itself – *la source de la vie*. It was clear that underneath she was not wearing anything down below as well.

At that moment she glanced up at me and our eyes met. They were soft, vulnerable and trusting eyes. I think she saw that I was blushing and perhaps looking into my eyes gave her courage. With her legs spread quite immodestly she said good bye with meaning, and then closed her cell phone slap into her lap. She left her cell phone between her legs, then turned away, drew her legs together, and then brought her hands to her face. She turned her head away and pressed her cheek against the glass. In her reflection in the glass I could see her profound sadness. Silent tears began to flow down her cheek. I felt sorry for her. She seemed so vulnerable, pure and innocent.

What was a good man to do, but reach for his handkerchief and be gallant. I stood and offered my handkerchief to her. “Here, take this” I said to her. She turned her sad eyes to me and took my handkerchief with a slight nod in the way of a thank you. It was more than just a gallant act, for I was offering her my kindness and sympathy too. A slight ripple across her brow told me that she understood. I sat back down and looked around. Several people were now smiling at me, a sort of public acknowledgement that they too felt sorry for the girl. I turned back and looked out the front window of the bus.

Across the Burrard Street Bridge we bounced. If there is an allegory to life it is the forever and never-ending changes being done to this old bridge. The renovations made every trip across it a pitched adventure, with new potholes, detours and restrictions. It was once just an automobile bridge, but now the Mayor of Vancouver felt the need to make it inconvenient to everyone, pedestrians, automobile and bicyclists alike. So much in trying to be all things to all people ... the old bridge now meant less to all three users. If you try to be all things to all people, at the end of the day you end up being nothing to everyone.

We swerved around a pot hole and I was nearly thrown from my seat. I glanced out of the corner of my eye at her to see how she was fairing in the maelstrom. The poor girl had gathered herself up into a ball and was peering out the window, silently crying her sad tears. She was not here. Instead she was far, far away. She didn’t see the bridge. I doubt she could even see the cloudless blue sky, or the calm aquamarine of English Bay. Perhaps it was

symbolic but I realized that she was not looking ahead where the bus was going, but was looking back where it had just been. She had chosen to sit this way, back to front. It was then that I felt even more sorry for her. But I did not look back at her directly, thinking at that moment and in her anguish, she needed some privacy, even sitting here in a crowded bus on a busy afternoon.

As we waited for the light to change and the traffic to move along at Burrard and Pacific, out of the corner of my eye I could see she had retrieved her cell phone from her lap and had quickly glanced over at me, perhaps to appraise me a second time. I did not smile, but kept looking earnestly out the front of the bus. I wanted her to see me for who and what I was, a kind and gentle soul. The light changed and we trudged through the intersection of Pacific up between the thin lane marked by gaudy colored traffic pylons, and tumbled to a stop at Davies Street to let some sinister looking buskers that smelled of sweat and beer off the bus. At Nelson we stopped to let some well dressed women passengers off the bus and also to take some nurses from St. Paul's Hospital on.

My stop was next, at Burrard and Georgia and so I stood and gathered myself up. She saw me stand, and turned back from the window so she could offer me back my handkerchief. I smiled warmly and said "keep it my dear. You might need it."

The bus came to an abrupt stop and the door opened with it slow purposeful heave. I thanked the bus driver, then hesitated and smiled at her. "Take care," I all but whispered this to her. It was an intimate gesture, in a not so

intimate place. She looked up at me with pleading eyes. As I stepped off the bus I could hear her scramble out of her seat and all but fall off the bus behind me. My last words to her were not meant to be an invitation, but I guess in her state of being she felt quite alone and needed some company. The bus chugged away leaving us two sorts at the curb.

As she had quickly grabbed it and scrambled off the bus, the contents of her hand bag had spilled to the ground at her feet. She scrambled to pick the objects up and put them back in her bag. I stood over her as she gathered up her things: a half empty bottle of water, a comb and her wallet, some coins, her cell phone, a pair of frilly pink panties and a tube of lip gloss. There was no lip stick or rouge, or anything false that vanity forces on a woman, not even a comb. No feminine hygiene products or Kleenex. She was who she was. As she snatched them up I sensed she had hoped I hadn't seen the pink frilly thing. I took no notice of this. I wasn't going to let her know that I already knew she wasn't wearing them.

Looking down at her she seemed so small and fragile. Through a small opening at the top of her blouse I could see she was indeed not wearing a brassiere. The smallness of her told me she was perhaps at most sixteen. There is such beauty to youth, I thought, that it is a pity we must all grow old and with time become less attractive. She was so beautiful and so lucky, but perhaps did not understand this. And how could I explain this to her, me a perfect stranger? Would I even get a chance to try, I thought.

Before she stood back up she looked up at me. I smiled reassuringly to her. Her soft blue eyes were those of a lost little puppy who had hoped had found

a new friend. I could have ignored her and walked away, leaving her to her sadness, but instead I offered her my hand and helped her to her feet.

She took my hand and used it to advantage to lift herself. She let my hand go immediately when she stood back on her feet, then she unconsciously fussed at her hair and looked away. “Umm, sorry.” She was very shy.

“Are you ok?” I dusted off her knees. She did not flinch or fuss while I did this. She trusted me.

We both looked away. Our eyes met in the store window in front of us. It was Victoria Secret, with all its pink intimacy. Here was a store window promotion of frilliness. I smiled. What irony! In the reflection we made a contrast of age and of genders. She was young and pretty, and I was old and distinguished.

I turned my head to her and said “you want to talk don’t you?” She did not say a word, nor even turned her head, but just nodded.

Warmly and reassuringly I put a hand on her shoulder and said, “then let us go somewhere and talk.” She saw my smile in the window, turned and smiled.

“Are you hungry?” I asked her.

She hesitated, then nodded.

“Do you like sushi?” I inquired and her face lit up brightly.

“That’s better, on the bus you looked so sad.” It was Friday afternoon and the city bustled with people on their zealous missions in life. The two of us ... well ... perhaps won’t be so zealous. We’ll just meander.

I turned and pointed up and across the street. “There is Shabusen ... “ She slung her bag over her shoulder and turned looking up at the popular Asian restaurant. We could both see a long line of people waiting to get a table.

“It looks crowded, and noisy too.” I understood – she wanted someplace quiet so we could enjoy each other’s company.

I knew of a quiet little Japanese restaurant on one of the side streets off Robson. I turned my head to her and said “I think there is a nice Japanese restaurant just around the corner. We have to walk two blocks to get to it.”

“Is it quiet?” I nodded. “That sounds nice.”

Then she did something I had not expected. She offered me her hand. Maybe she was worried of being abandoned. I took her hand. It was soft, small and delicate and cold. We started off together

“You’re hand is very warm,” she said.

“It is because I am very warm blooded,” I responded. She walked beside me as we crossed the street at the cross walk.

As we crossed the street, out of the corner of my eye I noticed how carefully and gracefully she walked. Without looking at her I asked her, “Are you a ballerina?”

She turned to me and answered, “Not anymore.”

“Are you a gymnast now perhaps?”

“Yes, how can you tell?”

“You walk so carefully and gracefully, and have the physique of someone who either does ballet, or gymnastics.”

She glanced over at me. “You look pretty healthy yourself ...” she said, but didn’t finish what she was thinking. I knew she was going to say ‘for someone your age’, but probably held back so as not to offend me. I wasn’t that old!

We chatted a bit about insignificant things as we walked one block west, then a half block south, to the entrance of the restaurant. The banner at its door fluttered limply in the breeze.

I opened the door for her and she stepped through. This was the first time I stood behind her and saw that her *Daisy Dukes* were cut far too high on the backside and that she was being a tad bit cheeky. I smirked as I stepped through the door and started down the stairs. I watched her walk ever so

lightly down the stairs in front of me. It must have been the ballerina in her that made her walk so elegantly.

The mix of her brashness and her vulnerability seemed paradoxical to me. Perhaps she was that age where childishness and adulthood met each other for the first time, face to face, and did not know what to make of each other. At that moment I wondered whether what she was experiencing with her ‘boy friend’ was some sort of loss of innocence. But then again, I thought, all of growing up is a loss of innocence. By the time we were at the bottom of the stairs I had decided not to oblige her, but instead to let her talk to me about whatever she wanted to talk to me about.

The waitress dressed in a simple plain kimono welcomed us and walked us gracefully to a quiet table. It was early in the afternoon and so the restaurant was all but empty. There was a couple grabbing a few bites of sushi at the sushi bar and washing their tid-bits down with an ample supply of Asahi beer. The woman was already tipsy and the man was filling her glass. I knew how that affair would end, with her panties around her ankles and a smile on his face.

The waitress sat us down in a table in the corner out of ear shot. I sat with my back to the wall. She had my undivided attention. The waitress left us our menus and asked whether we wanted some tea. “Tea and water,” I said.

Across the table I offered her my hand. “My name is Patrick.”

She lightly took my hand and we shook. “My name is Penny.”

“Please to meet you Penny.” Lacking any real life experience other than my wretched own growing up I was not very good with growing teenagers, but at that moment I decided to push a little to see what emotional state she was in. I didn’t want to have to sit opposite a tearful teenager, “ ... or is it Penelope?”

She held her ground and smirked. “I only let my grandmother call me that.”

I pushed back. “Penelope is such a lovely name” She looked at me with giant trusting eyes. “May I call you Penelope?”

She grinned and study my face intently. After a few long seconds she spoke. “Yes you may call me Penelope ...” She had made her decision to trust me.

I handed her a menu. “See what you like. Don’t worry about the price. It’s all free.”

“Free?” She looked around. “Free,” she said again.

“I write books. This meal won’t cost either of us a cent.”

“How’s that?” She had leaned back in her chair and held the menu at arm’s length balanced at the edge of the table.

“It’s all paid for by my book royalties. Other people are paying for our dinner.” I picked up a menu and started to read through it, letting her look at me ever so steadily.

“That’s rather nice ... usually I am told not to choose anything *extravagant*.”

My eyes shot up over my glasses. “Say that word again.”

“What word?” She responded timidly as if she had said a wrong word.

I grinned. “*Extravagant*.” I pronounced the word slowly and exquisitely.

She pronounced *extravagant* a second time, again with perfect diction and articulation.

“Marvelous,” I responded with a Cary Grant twang.

She giggled. “What’s marvelous?”

“The way you speak ... the Queen’s English through and through. How do you come by this?”

She lowered her head and blushed. “Girl’s school I guess.”

“Oh, where?” I was just being polite in asking.

“Vancouver Island.”

“You here on holidays?”

“No I live in Vancouver, but my parents are divorced. I am spending the summer with my grandmother.”

“Parents divorced, eh.”

“The only thing they can still agree upon is to send me to boarding school so they can get on with their own lives. I hate my parents ...”

“How are you holding up?”

“Not so good.”

The waitress returned with our tea and water, and we placed out orders. Bento boxes for both of us, her’s vegetarian and mine with chicken.

Once the waitress was out of earshot we continued. “I have been through a divorce myself a few years back.”

“Any children?” I don’t know why it is that a teenager would ask this question first except perhaps that their worlds are measured on such an individualistic basis.

“No ...,” I frowned, then continued. “I wanted several, but she couldn’t have children.”

“Didn’t you know this when you married her?”

“No ... I wanted a house full. It was only in the sixth year of our twelve years of marriage that she told me she couldn’t have children”

“She lied then.”

I nodded. “She did. And that’s not all she did too. She had an affair ...”

I was about to continue the sad story of my married life, and my wife’s affairs, and the difficult divorce when her cell phone rang. I stopped talking. She scrambled into her hand bag and grabbed up her cell phone. Penny looked scornfully at the incoming number. She answered the call.

“Oh, it’s you! Can’t you leave me alone?” Without letting him speak she hung up on him and sat there gripping the cell phone tightly in her hand, so tightly her knuckles were turning white. She was about to slam it onto the table in frustration when I stopped her with my hand. I shook my head and grimaced.

“If you break your cell phone what does that solve?” She lightly set the cell phone down on the table. “Nut’n I guess.” She slouched and pouted.

The cell phone gave a buzz and she flicked her finger across its face revealing a text message. She got flustered as she read it. Penny looked up

at me with frustrated eyes and then pushed the cell phone in front of me and pointed to it.

I turned my head around to read the message. “Where are you? Aren’t you coming?” I pushed her phone back to her.

“What’s going on?” When I asked her this Penny crossed her arms and sat further back in her chair.

“Listen, Penelope whatever we discuss together will remain our secret.”

She remained silent, pondering. “If it will make you feel better, you can ask me any questions you like. We will both be perfectly candid.”

The phone buzzed again. “He’s such a dick!” pointing at the phone.

If she had said jerk I would have imagined it was something relational but the d – word, coming from such an honest girl, told me that it was something sexual. I guess I thought of her as honest. A man in my position could hardly think otherwise. Sugar and spice and all things nice So I decided to tread boldly. “Is he up to mischief?”

She nodded.

“Is he blackmailing you?”

She nodded again, but this time more emphatically.

I could not help but notice she unconsciously glanced at her cell phone.

“Pictures?”

She nodded again. “How did you know?”

“I read about this all the time in the newspaper. It seems to be the fad, with selfies being so popular and all.” She shrugged her shoulders. “Did you send them to him, or did he grab them off your cell phone?”

Her eyes flickered in surprise. “You must be a detective!”

I pushed back against the table and leaned back in my chair. “Not really. It’s all a matter of subtle clues.”

“Subtle clues?”

“yes. When I mentioned pictures your eyes immediately shot over to your cell phone.”

“Oh.” Perhaps she was expecting more, but that was all I could give her. Yet she didn’t seem all that disappointed.

At that moment the waitress arrived with our miso soup. I started to enjoy mine and after a few seconds Penny followed suit. I took my time gathering

my thoughts. Penny downed her soup in one fell swoop. That told me that she wanted to talk.

I finished my soup and set the empty bowl aside. Without looking up I asked her, “tell me what happened?”

“At the party on Saturday he stole my cell phone out of my bag. He found a video on my cell phone.”

“A video? What kind of video.”

“Oh a silly video.” She all but huffed the word *silly* out.

“A silly video? I was curious. I looked at her and wondered what kind of a video she would have made that would trouble her so.

“Well, I didn’t make the video, my roommate at school did. She used my phone. I had just come out of the shower and didn’t have a stitch on me.”

“Why didn’t you delete the video off your phone?”

“My roommate and I both thought it was funny.”

Now was the time to test the temperature of the water. “So, your boy friend saw the video.” She grimaced as I said the b – word.

“He’s not my boy friend.” She had nearly shouted the words vehemently then toned down herself before continuing. “The dink emailed the video off my cell phone to himself.”

She was about to say something more explicit when our two bento boxes arrived. We let matters sit for a few minutes as we both pecked at our meals.

After a few minute she stopped eating, and I followed suit. I was all ears.

“I see you got your cell phone back.”

“When I could not find it, I got my roomie to call my number and there it was ringing away in his back pocket. He claimed he had found it on the floor, but I hadn’t taken it out of my bag at the party, so there. I knew he had lifted it from my handbag.”

“What did you do?”

“I just grabbed it back from him. Why?”

“Didn’t get angry at him, or kick a fuss?”

“Would it have made a difference?”

“I guess not.”

“As he gave my cell phone back when he smiled at me I knew something was wrong. Then I remembered the video. I asked him what he had done. Right to my face he threatened to send the video to all his friends if I don’t sleep with him.”

“Yup he’s a dick!” I said the word with conviction and she received it warmly. “Tell me about him.”

“I met him night at a party. I went there with my roomie, and her boy friend. Some of my other friends were there to. He was there with a girl.”

“At the party did you approach him, or did he approach you?”

“Guess ...”

I smirked. “He approached you didn’t he!”

She nodded.

“Is he older than you?”

“Yup.”

“Much?”

“He’s in his twenties, maybe twenty five or twenty six.” She nearly spat the words twenty five or twenty six out as she said them.

I looked at her face and thought it was safe for me to ask. “And may I ask how old you are?”

“Just turned sixteen.” Penny ran her hand through her hair. As she did this her bosom was outlined in her blouse, but either because she was aroused in anger or maybe because the restaurant was a bit cold, there was more definition to them. I did not glance down. I had been right about her age.

She looked away and then said “He has got a terrible *reputation*.” She pronounced the word reputation with deliberation. “He likes to sleep with young girls, virgins I imagine. I wonder how he knows ...” She looked away from me as she said the last few words.

That was telling! I pressed on. “If he deflowers young girls, he must have a reputation,.”

“Deflowers?”

I smiled. “Think of a rose.”

“Oh ... Pluck the petals. ... ” She blushed as she said this, then looked up at me with a very soft and innocent expression. “You don’t use dirty words do you?”

I shook my head. “The English language has so many other better words to use. Besides I wouldn’t want to ruffle your innocent sensibilities.”

“Thanks.”

“For what?”

“For saying that I am innocent.”

“You are too beautiful to be anything but.” I think she understood that I was using the word beautiful as a euphemism for virginal. I hardly knew the girl but I didn’t want to affront her with such a prim and delicate stigma. Besides, why should it matter to the world, when it really only needed to matter to her. It was her body after all!

Penny’s eyes shone warmly. “It’s a pity you are not my father.”

“Why?”

“If I told my father what was going on he would have called me a tramp, or hussy.” She paused for a few seconds deciding whether to share a secret with me. She leaned forward and shared with me “I am still a virgin.” Penelope whispered the V-word and now I understood better where she stood. She blushed as she said this.

“When I was your age and until I was much older too, I was a virgin.”

“Oh.” She looked at me surprised. “I thought all boys lost their virginity by my age.”

“I can’t speak for anyone else, but I am Catholic and I was taught a certain sensibility.”

“Sensibility?”

“Sensibility is a a certain perspective to life. Take for instance your mother’s view. What do you think she would say about your predicament?” It suddenly dawned on me that it was a predicament that Penelope was in, nothing more, and I was to be her Duddly Do-Right.”

“She would say, it serves you right meeting strangers at a party. But ...”

“But what?” I knew she was about to share with me another secret.

“My mother had me when she was eighteen.”

“Ah. If only the children knew the mischief their parents have gotten into!” She laughed when I said this. I paused for a second or two and thought about what I was about to say. It would be a fork in the road of our conversation, and which direction she took would decide what comes next. “I think you can break that cycle can’t you!”

Penny dropped her head and sat pensively for a few seconds. I sensed something significant in what I had just said, and so carried on. “And how much older is your father compared to your mother?”

She lifted her head and said “twelve years ...” I smirked.

“So your father was thirty when you were born?” She nodded and understood the meaning of my smirk.

Penelope smiled and sat back in her chair in the realization that her father had seduced her mother, and wasn’t that what her blackmailer was trying to do to Penny. Her father had gotten into her mother’s panties and Penny was the result. It had been nothing but sex. There had been no love. Just a tumble *et voila, une bebe*.

“When did they divorce?”

“When I was twelve. From a young age I knew that they didn’t really love each other.” I could sense an indignation fill Penny, or perhaps it was a new found courage.

“It must have been hard for you?” In the context of her life there was so much more going on with her predicament, than just the obvious!

“Not really. And I spent most of my growing up either at boarding school, or staying with my grandparents, or my aunt. Now I have some freedom ...” Things were beginning to make more sense for Penny, and she was shining.

I was getting more and more curious. “What does your father do?”

“He’s an airline pilot. While I was growing up he was away all the time.”

“And your mother?”

“Well, she had finished high school, but never went to university and never worked a day in her life. To be perfectly frank, she was a trophy wife.”

When she said this my eye brows shot up. Penny nodded and smirked at the same time. “Trophy wife! Where did they meet?”

“Only once, in a fit of anger with my father who was having another one of his endless affairs, did my mother tell me the story.”

Penny paused and gauged me. I waited intently for her to continue.

“She was coming back from a trip to Italy. It was her high school graduation gift. She had backpacked through Italy for a month.”

“Did they meet on her trip?”

“No. It seems my mother had had a fling with a handsome Italian boy and he had broken her heart. She had just met him a few days before flying home and well Casanova tried to seduce her, but she wouldn’t sleep with the Italian boy. She said she had never had a boy friend in high school, my grandparents wouldn’t let her ... too much of a distraction. They wanted her to get good marks and go to university.”

“How then did your parents meet?” I was intrigued.

“As she flew home she regretted her missed chance to have a fling with the Italian boy. My father was the Air Canada pilot who flew her home. He was the rebound.” Penny paused for a moment. “I don’t know if I should tell you the rest of the story.”

“You don’t have to if you don’t want to. I understand.”

Penny’s eye teared over as she continued. “When they arrived in Vancouver, they met as she picked up their knapsack at the carousel and well ... my mother, in the befuddled state she was in, instead of going straight home like a good girl, decided to spend the afternoon with my father in a hotel room up the street from the airport and well ... she lost her virginity to him that afternoon in that dingy hotel room. She got pregnant. Five months later they were married and nine months later I was born.”

I sat silent and stone faced. I didn’t want to be judgmental; on the off chance Penny might stop talking.

“I was unwanted from the very beginning by my mother, but my grandparents insisted that she have me, whatever the circumstances. They wanted grandchildren and well, reluctantly my mother married my father, for my sake, not there’s.”

“It must have been hard for you when you were growing up.” I said these words with a very gentle tone. There were still tears welling in her eyes, but I did not want to unleash the flood gates.

“They both had affairs while I was growing up, which made me feel even less wanted, caught between their animosity towards each other.”

“How awful!”

“I think the only decent thing they ever did was they waited until I was old enough to manage before they divorced.”

“How considerate of them.” I really did not mean what I had just said. She knew I was being facetious.

“My father is still having his flings, a new girl friend every second month. My mother was married again last spring and when they got married her new husband didn’t want me. He has three kids of his own, little boys younger than me.”

“Well, well, well.”

“At the beginning of the summer I spent a few weeks visiting my mother and her new family, but the three little boys, the little devils, were used to running around the house without anything on. The sight of all those little penises flopping about was something my mother did not want her young and impressionable daughter to see ...” When she said impressionable she paraphrased the words with her fingers to provide emphasis. “It isn’t as if I hadn’t seen a penis before.”

I laughed. “How old are the three boys?”

“The twins are four and the eldest is six.”

“Less than half your age!”

“Yes. All the noise was driving me a bit batty.” She paused for a moment before continuing. “Can I ask you something?”

I leaned forward. “Sure, anything.”

“Are all boy’s penises so small.”

I laughed. “That’s some question. Can I ask you ... all girl’s fancies the same?”

“No.”

“When you were small, all of you was proportional to your size. Now that you are older, isn’t your fancy more fanciful then when you were six?”

“Well ... yes.”

“It’s the same for boys too. For both a girl or a boy, the best of them are about the size of their thumbs.” When I said this she glanced first at her thumb, then at mine. She had an astonished look on her face.

“You don’t believe me do you?” She shrugged her shoulder. I lifted my right hand and held it for her to see for a few seconds then I put my hand down the front of my pants and placed my thumb next to my fancy for a few second. Then I took my hand out of my pants and placed it on the table in front of me and nodded.

She giggled. It was an invitation to her, which she accepted. She followed suit and did the same for herself and placed her thumb next to mine. Her hand was smaller than mine and so everything was sized accordingly. Her thumb shone with what I knew was a dram of her passion. With my thumb I circled hers several times before I drew my thumb away. Her hand got very warm as I caressed her.

She left her hand on the table as she looked up at me. Her face shone with her affection as she continued with her story. “To spite my mother, I started to sleep without anything on. Early one morning I walked from my room to the bathroom to take a pee without anything on and well ... the little boys saw me and went crazy. Their father’s tongue dragged along the ground and my mother blew her stack! He now wanted me to stay and she wanted me to go. What a switch a little tease can do!”

“You kind of knew that would happen, didn’t you?”

“Yes ...”

“So why did you do it?”

“I didn’t want to be lumped in with his three little boys, and I don’t want to be seen as a little girl anymore.”

“That must have taken a great deal of courage to do.” I now sensed she had both courage and defiance to her. I sensed she was also trying to find her way through life without much in the way of moral or spiritual support. I sensed that at the very centre of her was a warm and good heart.

“Not really. I just needed to pee.” I put my hand back next her’s, thumb to thumb. Penny smiled warmly at me. She caressed my thumb. “So I am now staying with my grandmother and at the end of the summer it is back to boarding school for me.”

Things were also beginning to make sense to me as well – why was she needing to speak to a perfect stranger about her predicament. She could not speak to her mother or father about it, could she? Our just shared intimacy bought a good ten minutes of respite in her emotional storm and so we ate some more of our Japanese food.

Then her cell phone buzzed again as another text message came in. She was about to answer it when I said “leave it. Let’s just finish our meal in peace.”

“You’re right, let’s.” Penny looked at me and flushed. Her irises grew wide. I could tell she felt something warm in her heart for me. And so we ate on. Every few minutes the phone buzzed a few more times like an insistent and irritating beetle, but we both ignored its droning.

When she was finished her meal, although I was yet to finish mine, I stopped eating mine and pushed it away. I took a sip of my tea and she followed suit.

I wanted her to talk with me some more, so I asked her, “how do you feel now?”

“Much better. You are a very nice person.”

“So are you.” Her eyes met mine and they were now more happy eyes.

The waitress came and asked if we were finished. I nodded for both of us and she carried away our bento boxes. Penny had done a number on her’s and there was not even a grain of rice left over. “You must have been hungry,” I said. “Very ... my appetite has come back.” I wondered if she had not eaten since Saturday night. I could see her worrying herself needlessly.

Her phone buzzed again and we both glanced at her cell phone at the same time.

“Should I,” she asked.

“If you have to,” I replied. She took up her cell phone and started to leaf through the text messages. She let out a big sigh. “Here, look.”

She handed me the cell phone. He had emailed her, her own video to up the ante. “Do you want to watch it?”

“Do you want me too? I don’t have to if you don’t want me to.”

She paused for a moment and then said, “go ahead. Tell me what you think.”

“Come sit next to me and we will watch it together. If you want to stop it at any time I’ll understand.” She got up from her side of the table and I moved over one seat to let her sit next to me. The cell phone was on the table between us and after she had settled in Penelope touched the screen to start the video.

The quality of the lighting and audio was poor. It was obviously taken in a dorm room and sometime late at night. There she walked in wearing her robe and a towel wrapped around her head. She giggled when she realized her roommate was filming her.

“Take it off,” her roommate said as she hummed a burlesque tune, and without a hesitation she pulled at the belt to her robe and let the robe fall open. “Take it all off.” And so she obliged, standing in the dim light with nothing on except the towel on her head, which she balanced carefully with one hand. Penny was slim and soft, and proportioned in a way that spoke of a great and marvelous figure that would soon be hers. Her natural hair color was blonde, that I could see. The voice of her roommate said, “twirl

around” and so she did, very gracefully. She had that remarkable plumpness that health and youth bestowed on only the most beautiful.

“You are very, very beautiful.”

“Thank you,” she whispered into my ear. I could feel the warmth of her body next to me.

She let me watch the video to the very end which had the climax that she dropped the towel from her head and used it to dry herself. There was perhaps a few seconds that were too explicit. Out of the corner of her eye I could see she was studying me and gauging my reaction to those few seconds. Perhaps those few seconds were why she was so upset about the video. I let those seconds pass like any other’s in the video.

When the video was over we sat quietly for a few seconds. What I didn’t tell her was that I was now very aroused. What warm blooded man wouldn’t be.

“Well?” she asked me. I looked at her and could see a mixture of pleading and curiosity in her eyes.

“I don’t think you should worry very much. There are only a few seconds where we see *la source de la vie*.”

“La source de ...? ”

“La Source de la Vie – the place where life springs forth.”

She giggled nervously. “You are funny! I have never heard anyone call it that?”

“What would you call it?”

She whispered, “The c-word ...”

I whispered back. “Vulgar. Now that’s not proper Queen’s English!” I was teasing her.

“The V-word then?”

I shook my head. “Rather clinical, don’t you think.” We were now playing a rather saucy word game.

She got more courageous. “My snatch ...”

I scratched my chin. “Do you know where that word comes from?”

She shook her head.

“Now I know for certain you are innocent.” Penelope’s face went bright red. “When a woman and a man make love she takes part of him into her ... snatching him up so to speak.”

“You mean his ...” she looked down at me stuttered to a stop. It now was evident to her that I was aroused.

“Yes ... his ...” I looked down at myself as well. There was poignancy to our moment of whispered intimacy. “ ... John Thomas ...”

“His what?”

“That’s how D.H. Lawrence described the male bits.”

“The English writer?”

“Yes ... in his book *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*. And she is Lady Jane Grey.”

“I have not read THAT book.” There was a prudishness to the word that.
“It’s a bit naughty isn’t it?”

“A bit ... I just finished reading it for a second time.”

“Patrick ...”

“Yes ...”

“I don’t think I would ever call it a Jane. I have a classmate named Jane and well she’s a bit of a headache. No ... my Jane won’t do!”

“Then how about your *Delta of Venus*?”

She giggled again. “I have never heard that expression before. It sounds rather charming.”

“There are few others. Want to hear them?

She nodded.

“The best of you ... your second pairs of lips ... your fancy. You can have fun with them.”

“How so?”

“None of these expressions are vulgar. Imagine ... tickling your fancy.”

“Eww.” She said this with an alluring inflection.

“Or caressing your second pair of lips.”

“Um ...” She unconsciously licked her lips as I said this. She obviously understood the meaning.

“Sharing the best of you ... with the rest of the world.”

“They are lovely. Where do these expressions come from?”

“I have come across them in different pieces of literature. *The Delta of Venus* for instance comes from Anais Nin.”

“Who is he?”

“He is actually a she. Anais Nin was a writer born in France in 1903 to Cuban parents. She passed away in 1977. Anais Nin wrote many books and short stories, and kept a rather infamous diary. She wrote a famous book full of short erotic stories in the 1970’s called *The Delta of Venus*. At one point in her life she had two lovers and two husbands at the same time.”

“No! You’re making this up!”

“No I’m not. It’s true! Perhaps I shouldn’t recommend her writing to you. How old are you again?”

“Sixteen.”

“Better wait a few years before you read any Nin.”

The beetle buzzed again. “What should I do about him?”

“Definitely don’t spread your legs for him.”

“I wasn’t going to.” She almost spat the words out. “Can’t you be more helpful than that!”

“What he is doing is wrong on so many levels. Beyond the blackmail, you are barely the age of consent in Canada and he is much older than you. If you consent to share a bed with him it will be hard to punish him. Worst yet, you could get pregnant and it might be a repeat of what your parents went through, or worst.”

“Worst?”

“Let’s not go there.” I didn’t really want to worry her any more than she already was.

“Yes, let’s not! I don’t want to have anything to do with him.”

“You know that and I know that ... but how to get him to accept that?” I paused. “There are many possibilities here. Do you have to be anywhere soon?”

She shook her head. “Good, let’s walk a bit and talk some more.”

She glanced back over her shoulder and then turned back to me. “I have got to pee.”

“Can you do me a favor?”

“What?”

“Can you put your panties back on?”

“How did you know? Oh ... yes ... when they fell out of my bag.”

“Actually, I noticed that on the bus. Remember when you glanced over at me and I was blushing.”

“Oh, yes.”

“Well, I had glanced over. You were so preoccupied with her cellphone call that you had swung your legs opened and closed so much that *j’ai vu ta source de la vie.*”

“Do you speak French?”

“Yes ...”

“Oh.” She blushed.

“It is fine Penelope. I do art. I draw or paint artist models all the time. *Les Français ce dit qu’une belle femme est une oeuvre d’art.* I can close my eyes and imagine what you really look like and I would not be that far off. ”

“You are very different than any other man I have ever met.”

“Perhaps because I understand the difference between love and lust, and they aren’t the same thing.”

Then she did something I had not expected. Penny reached into her bag and took the pink frilly thing out and handed it to me. “Hold on to this for a while for me ...” Before I could say anything she had turned and was dashing to pee.

I hid her unexpected gift beneath the table and carefully folded them and put it safely in my pocket. It was barely enough to cover her.

I got up, picked up my things, left a tip and proceeded to pay for our meals. By the time I had paid Penelope was back standing beside me, holding herself close to my side. I looked down at her. She was happy and so pure and so fragile. Yet something intimate of hers was burning a hole in both my pocket, and my psyche.

“Shall we go ... uncle?” The word uncle brought a warm smile from the waitress. In her fancy silk kimono she gracefully bowed and ushered us to the door. “Please come again.” She was going to open the door for us both but I got there first and opened the door for Penelope. I bowed to her. “Thank you.”

Up the stairs Penny bounced in her *Daisy Dukes*. I wondered if she knew the effect this has on a warm blooded male. Then I caught myself. I could tell by the pronounced swing of her hips, of course she does.

She pushed through the door at street level and held it open for me. The sun reflected off her shining eyes. Penny was a different person now compared

to when we have arrived. She was happy and did not feel alone. She took my arm and we started to walk silently towards Robson street.

“Where should we go next?” she asked.

I shrugged my shoulders. “You decide.”

“Let’s go to Stanley Park! I haven’t been there in ages.”

“Neither have I.” I regretted having the two things I was carried over my shoulder but they felt lighter than usual, buoyed up by the spirit of her happiness. “Yes, let us walk in Stanley Park.”

And so off we went, trudging and weaving through the foot traffic, but not on Robson Street but on Alberni street, one street over and parallel to Robson. And as we walked, we talked on ever more intimate terms.

“Do you like me?” Penny asked.

“Yes, I do. I just met you Penelope, and hardly know you but ...”

“But what ...”

“I am old enough to be your father. Our liking can at most be platonic.”

“Platonic, what does that mean.”

“It means in thoughts but not in actions. You love me don’t you.”

She looked down as she answered. “I do.”

“But you hardly know me.”

She stopped and so did I. Penny peered earnestly into my eyes. “I know you are kind and thoughtful, and that I trust you.” She leaned up and kissed me on the cheek. Her lips were warm against my face. I was touched by her gentleness and leaned down and kissed her on her cheek in return. Her skin was warm and soft and had a faint fragrance. Perhaps she was wearing perfume.

“I too am in good company.” We continued on slowly and carefully.

That faint fragrance seemed too natural to be manmade. It was not the fragrance of a fruit or a flower. I stirred when I realized that her pheromone was telling me that she was ovulating, and the reason she wasn’t wearing her panties perhaps was because she wanted she share the essence of her fecundity with the world. I flushed. If this is the case, for a young woman Penelope knew more about life than I would have given her credit for when I first met her. But I also knew I had to walk carefully, for hormones can be a very powerful thing in a young woman and I did not want either of us to become crazy over them.

We walked a bit in silence. I was now mystified as to what was going on. With every lungful of her fragrance, Penny was confusing me. Did she

know this? I did not have any children because I am Catholic and true to my Catholic sensibilities. If I was not so Catholic, here was a chance for me to become a father. I pushed that thought as far back into my mind as possible.

I must have been frowning because Penny stopped to ask me what I was thinking.

“You are so beautiful ... so pure ... so innocent.” As I said this a ray of light shown down onto her and her hair sparked in the sun. “I wish I could take a picture of you here and now.” She took out her cell phone pressed a few buttons and handed it to me. I snapped two pictures of her before the ray of light faded.

“Beautiful ...” I handed her back her cell phone.

She looked at the pictures. “Let me send them to you.” I took a piece of paper out of my pocket and wrote my email address on it and handed it back to her.

“What, no telephone number?”

“I never download files off my cell phone. Besides I never answer my cell calls. Send the pictures to my email account. If you want to text me that’s fine.” I took back the piece of paper and wrote my cell number and wrote the word *Text* next to it. “A text costs a dime, a call a dollar. I read my texts.”

Penny wrote a quick text and in an instant my cell phone jangled and told me I had a text message. I smiled and took my cell phone out of my pocket and checked the text. “Smart Boy :D!” I texted her back “Smart Girl :D!” We had extended our little tete-a-tete into the future.

I could tell she felt immensely happier and was a far different person than the forlorn girl on the bus. But her predicament had not yet been sorted out. Our conversation had merely given her some defiance and courage. We walked along and I being a good head taller than her cast a penumbra over her that partly protected her from the hot afternoon sun. My green fedora hat cast a shadow over her head.

As she stepped in and out and back into my penumbra that I first noticed that she had faint freckles. Her freckles were either fading or coming into their prominence. Penny’s skin was so fair it was hard to tell. Perhaps there was a reason why she stayed out of the sun. Perhaps it was because she burned easily in the direct sun, or she didn’t want her freckles to become too visible. Penny seemed to me that fair haired, fair skinned maiden that you heard about in romantic operas.

We walked and chatted about many things as we made our way to Denman street. When we got there we ducked into a convenience store to grab something cool to drink, but would wait to enjoy it. We also bought a few things to munch on as well. By the time we got to the corner of Denman and Georgia we were in high spirits for a walk about the park. One more crosswalk and were at the nose of Stanley Park.

Just as we were crossing Georgia street her cell phone rang. When we got to the other side she checked the number but didn't answer the call. It was evident who it was from. A text message buzzed when she did not answer the call. "What am I going to do with him?"

"Well, Penelope ... the first thing I would suggest you do is to stop getting so worked up about him. I agree with you. He is a dink ..." She giggled when I said this.

"The next thing is not to worry he will release the video."

"But I know he will."

"If he does ... he gets nothing out of it. "

"I don't understand."

"It's a blackmailer's dilemma. He holds power over you as long as you think he does. As long as he holds the video over you, he thinks you will cave in and sleep with him."

"But I won't ..."

"The real dilemma is to convince him it doesn't matter either way, whether he does or he doesn't release the video, you will not sleep with him. Or ..."

"Or what?"

“Is this is the first time he has used blackmail it will damage his future prospects.

“But it’s not the first!”

“Do you know that for certain?”

“Yes, here.” She cycled through some of her messages and found what she was looking for and showed it to me. It was a text message from a girl friend of hers who said that he had done pretty much the same thing to her, and she had caved in and regretted it.

“And what did he have over her?”

“She sent him some selfies.”

“Have you seen them? How are they compared to your video?”

“Yes I have seen them and they are far more personal. She essential put the camera down between her legs.”

“Silly girl ... and a picture like that can never be taken back. Why did she send him the pictures?”

“He said he loved her, and she believed him!”

“I bet she regrets ever meeting him. Did they meet at a party?”

“Yes ... same as me.” We had arrived near the round-about at the entrance of Stanley Park.

“Do you want to walk to the Rose garden?”

She looked up at me and her face radiated happiness. “Yes, let’s! I love roses. My grandmother has a wonderful rose garden. It will probably be less crowded there.”

“You don’t like crowds do you?” She shook her head. We started to walk to the left along Pipeline Road towards the Rose garden. We walked a minute or so without speaking then I asked

“Did he release the pictures like he threatened he would?”

“No he didn’t.”

“But she went to bed with him?”

“Yes. She was more scared of the pictures getting out.” Besides she had already had sex and so it wasn’t a big deal for her.”

“Oh ... In her selfies did she show her face?”

“No actually.”

“Although her selfies were graphic, she could have said no to him. How was anyone to know whose fancy was in the picture? After all, unless one knows otherwise, one fancy looks as fancy as the next fancy.”

Penny giggled. “Lovely word – fancy.”

“It has its uses.” We were approaching the rose garden. There were two or three couples milling about, but they were enthralled in their own emotions and did not seem to notice us.

We stopped at the head of one of the beds of roses. There were red roses, and pink ones, as well as a few white and yellow ones. The roses were in the shadow of some tall trees and had been freshly watered. They were in their best bloom.

She stopped and stooped to take one of the roses ever so carefully in her hand. I ignored the fact that her assets were visible and moved beside her. It seemed so touching to see how carefully she touched the roses. “We are visiting the roses at their best,” she said. She stood. In her happiness she gave me a hug. The two of us were in a ready contrast to the other couples milling about. We probably looked more like father and daughter, than two new found intimate friends.

She turned to me with a worried look on her face and whispered. “But you can see my face in the video.”

“Well, sort of. Let us sit and look at it together again.”

“Again? Why do you need to see it again?”

“Well ... if it were shown to a total stranger, is it possible that the person in the video could be someone else?”

“But it is me.”

“You know that, and I know that. But what if you can claim it is not you! Who is to know? No one has seen you without your clothes on except your roomie right!”

“And my doctor ... and my mom, and my grandmother ... and now you, in the video.” She blushed as she said that.

“I promise not to tell!” I laughed. One of the couples looked up at us, then turned away. I lowered my voice. “But he hasn’t seen you without any clothes on has it?”

“Noooooooo.”

“Well then, there we go. Even if he releases the video, you can deny it is you, and who is to know?”

“But ... “ she had a strained frown on her face, “I don’t like lying!”

“Not even a little white lie?” I used my fingers to emphasize the word little.

“I have been taught to always tell the truth.” Her frown had changed to a smirk. “But then ...

“Sometimes a little white lie hurts far less than the truth. Have you admitted to him that you are the person in the video?”

“No I haven’t!” Her face brightened up.

“So it is implied it is you.”

“Implied?”

“Assumed.”

“Yes, he assumes it’s me.” Now she was beaming with a smile. “Now I understand what you are getting at.”

“Just tell him it is not you, and see what happens.”

“It’s worth a try!” She walked over to a bench in the shade and sat down. I sat down next to her. Penny began to compose a short text, which she showed me.

<The girl in the video is not me!> I nodded and Penny sent it on its way.

A few seconds later came a response. <Sure it is ...>

“He is not buying it.” Penny frowned.

“What do you expect him to say? Don’t give up so easily. Push back.” I motioned with my hands as I said ‘push back,’ and so she did.

<No it isn’t. And, I don’t care what you think!>

Almost immediately came his response. <You’re a cunt.>

“He’s getting angry.” She was pleased with herself. “Should I get angry too?”

“No, keep your cool. If you stay cool then he might think that you are telling the truth.” I looked into her eyes to gauge her sense of things. There were worry lines around her eyes. “Penelope, if you get angry he will know you are being defensive, and know it is you in the video.”

“What shall I text him back then?”

“Tell him it doesn’t matter what he does, that you are not going to sleep with him.”

She sent him that message word for word. He snapped back < You can’t run and hide. I’ve got your number.> “What now?”

“Give me your cell phone.” She handed it to me and I wrote the following < If you don’t stop harassing me I’ll tell my boy friend.> I gave her back her phone. She looked up at me and smiled, then sent the text.

There was a minute long pause then a text buzzed back. <Ha, ha ... right. You don’t have a boy friend!>

“What are we going to do?” She was again worried.

I shrugged my shoulders. “I guess we need to convince him you have a boy friend.”

“How will we do that?” She said this with a tired and deadpan tone to her voice.

“There’s an easy way ...” I paused for a second. “And a hard way.”

“What’s the easy way?” She was honestly curious.

“The easy way is you can take a selfie of us kissing and send it to him.”

She leaned over and was about to snap a quick pic of us kissing when I stopped her. “This picture should be better staged.” I took her hand and guided her onto my lap. She was so light.

She giggled. “What a good idea! And what’s the hard way?”

“If this doesn’t work I will tell you. Here, hold your cell phone over my shoulder and take a picture of you kissing me.”

Penny looked deep into my eyes and said in a deep and trembling voice “this will be fun.”

“Close your eyes when you kiss, and it will seem more passionate.” So she closed her eyes and leaned forward and just as our lips touched I could hear the snap of the camera. She leaned back and quickly looked at the picture. It only showed her ear and the side of her head.

“Are you nervous?” I asked her.

“Yes.” There was a tremble in her voice.

“So am I.”

“Why are you nervous?” she asked me.

“I don’t often get to kiss a pretty woman like you. Why are you nervous?”

“I have never kissed a boy before!” I looked at her and saw that she was blushing.

“Never!”

“Never!”

“I didn’t know. Should we stop?”

No, why?”

“Maybe you would want to leave your first kiss for someone special?” I said this with earnestness in my voice. And I started to try to lift her off my lap, but she wanted to stay put.

“I am” I felt my face grow warm. “Now you’re blushing,” she said.

I took my hand up to my face and felt its warmth. “So I am.”

“You are so kind and gentle.” Penny was touching my heart with her words.

I said to her, “it’s my nature. I cannot be any other way.”

“Let’s try again,” she said and then brought her lips again close to mine. This time her kiss lingered on my lips and it was a good twenty seconds before she took the first picture. My heart was pounding with a rush of adrenaline. My masculinity was once again stirring.

Penny stuck the tip of her tongue out of her lips as we kissed. I teased her in return. Our tips touched each other. I opened my mouth, slowly inviting her in. She entered me timidly and shivered. Penny stopped at the threshold.

With my hand I stroked the small of her back. As we lingered in our kiss I traced the indentation of her spine up her back. Her skin was soft and warm. Her back was true and straight and she was indeed not wearing a brassiere.

My hand reached around her torso so that my fingers were just caressing the edge of her breast. I wanted to tease, but not grabble her. My finger delicately traced the underside of her breast. It was marvelously indescribable, Penny's softness. It would have been so easy to press upwards, to the mystery of her but I am a gentle man and so I moved my hand down away towards her stomach and then then receded again to the small of her back. She groaned as I receded. She reached down for my hand and wanted to guide it back onto her breast but I muttered "no..." which made her more passionate. She kissed with more ardor.

Over her shoulders I drew a heart on her back and as I did this she took another picture, then another, then another. It was a good thirty seconds before we came up for air. We were both not in a big hurry to look at the selfies. Instead she leaned forward and placed her cheek against my face and whispered three marvelous words in my ear – "I love you."

I whispered the same words into her ear and she asked me with her simple eagerness "will you be my boy friend?"

I answered easily "I will be your friend ..." and she gave me a big hug, pressing herself against me with that remarkable honesty that she seem to have towards me. She was still sitting on my lap and it was getting harder

and harder for me to hide the fact that I was stirring. I hoped she wouldn't notice.

She looked so happy. Her eyes sparkled and her face was healthy and flush with the happiness of youth. What she felt at that moment I could only imagine. The way she had described her life I imagined she was very lonely and lacking in those genuine and sincere human contact that a woman would need. As a boy I had grown up without much love shown me, so I sort of understood her. Even at that point in my life I did not understand what true love truly meant. I was a romantic at heart.

"Let's see the pictures," I said and together we looked at the selfies. The first one was again a snap of her ear and side of her head.

The second one showed more of her face and the corner of one eye, partly opened. She was looking at the camera and she had moved when she took the picture so it was blurred. It made for a surreal image.

The third picture showed her eye was closed and you could see that she was blushing.

The fourth was perfect. It showed Penny in the fits of passion. I stirred as she showed me this one. "Send him this one." My voice sounded so aethereal. Penny was affecting me so deeply.

And so she did. She sent him that last of the four picture. You could tell she was kissing a man but you could not see who it was she was kissing. You could also see Penny was enjoying the full passion of the moment.

She looked at me. “Do you remember your first kiss?”

I smiled and nodded. “Well ... It has been many years since the awkwardness of my first kiss ...”

“Tell me!” I hesitated. Her eyes pleaded. I shrugged my shoulders and continued.

“As it happened, when I was in my grade nine English class we did our own version of *Romeo and Juliet*, and ... I was chosen by the teacher to play the role of Romeo.”

“You Romeo! Sounds like fun! “

“Well it anything but. At the time I was a thin wisp of a boy, shy and anything but a Romeo.”

She drew her legs up and well, I think she could now feel my state. She kissed me on the cheek. “Look at you now!” She settled herself deeper into my lap to tease me.

“I was a Catholic boy ...” Penny was breaking my concentration. I moaned.

“A Catholic boy ...” she parroted in jest.

“Yes ... going to a Catholic bilingual French-English school surrounded by Nuns, crucifixes and the constant reminders of original sin ... “

“Original sin?” she rocked back and forth. It was having a deep effect on me.

“It’s a Catholic thing. Supposedly we all come into the world with original sin and well, we had to behave ourselves or we don’t get into heaven.”

“And so you were Romeo.” She swung her hips back and forth. “Have you behaved yourself?”

“Ah ha.” I was trying hard to concentrate. “Then I was so chaste that I had yet to even kiss a girl, let alone danced with one.

“And now?”

“Well, I am a bit older, not so chaste, and have more life experiences.”

She giggled.

“Casting me in the role of Romeo was a truly unpopular one, among most of the boys in particular and among some but not all of the girls in my class. It

was probably the main controversy of that school year, or at least it felt as much for me.”

“Was it now! Why?” She rocked back and forth. I knew she knew the effect she was having on me.

“Several of the boys and girls in my class had already had sex. Everyone knew that. And here was Romeo being played by a chaste, and virginal boy.”

She leaned forward and whispered into my ear. “You were a virgin?”

I whispered into her ear, “yes, I was a virgin.”

“But not any more, I hope.”

“What do you think?” She giggled.

“From the moment it was decided I was going to play Romeo, I was bullied in the worst sort of way but some of the boys who hoped to intimidate me out of the role. Some of the girls also gave me a cold shoulder.”

“Sounds awful!” She caressed my cheek with her hand.

“It was. Given who I was at that point in my life, I wondered why anyone would want to play Juliet opposite this Romeo. Maybe it was the status of the thing.”

Then I had the remembrance. I went silent and smiled.

“What are you thinking?”

“Well, that year one of the girls in our class got pregnant. The baby’s father was a boy a few grades ahead who went to a Protestant school. ”

“What happened?”

“Being a Catholic my sixteen year old classmate gave birth to her baby and offered her child up to adoption. She was not allowed to return to our Catholic school afterwards and ended up at a public one instead, ostracized by almost all of her old classmates, except me.”

“You were a kind person even then.”

“When I came to her defense, the rumor bounded around the school that I was the father, but I didn’t mind the rumor if it meant a certain luscious patina to my knightly armor. Why, given the circumstance, would I go out of my way to dispel such a rumor, why?”

“You liked her didn’t you?”

“Yes I did.”

I nodded, dropped my head and sighed.” “At one point even my mother found the need to ask me ... *are you the father* ... and well, we do have to be honest with our mothers.”

“Why are you so sad?”

“I am sad because as a boy I will never be able to bring a baby into the world.”

Penny looked at me in astonishment.

“My pregnant classmate had let me touch her belly and feel the kick of her baby. She had lifted her blouse and made sure I understood how grand she was and how inadequate the breasts of my other female classmates were at the time.”

“No!” I nodded. Her irises had grown big and inviting. “It was when my pregnant classmate let me see her breasts that I first had the epiphany that God created women’s breasts to make us men envious.” Penny took my hand and slowly guided it under her blouse. I had not wanted to become so intimate with her but who was I to oppose her. So I let her. For a half minute I held the plum of her in the palm my hand and peered deep into her eyes. “You are so soft.”

“You are so gentle.”

I could feel her heart beat against her breast. “You are so beautiful ...” beat “and pure” ... beat “and innocent ...” beat. She leaned forward and kissed me ever so gently. I let my hand drop. I could see Penny was disappointed I was being so timid with her.

“And well, without at all asking, my pregnant classmate also let me spy *la source de la vie* for the first time covered, mind you, in her luxurious mystery of chestnut colored pubic hair.”

“You saw what her ... fancy looked like?”

I nodded. “She leaned back and spread her legs. But I did not touch her. She wanted me to but I was too shy. Besides, if I had she would have noticed my hand was shaking. For me to try to imagine a baby entering the world by such a small, soft and gentle slip made it obvious to me, then and there, that a baby is indeed a gift from God.”

“Petite, soft and gently ... You are such a romantic. That is not how I would describe my fancy.”

“Girls are very beautiful. I don’t think I have ever seen anything more beautiful than *la source de la vie*. Those few minutes with my pregnant classmate was an education about the birds and the bees that no Catholic textbooks could provide me.”

There was an awkward silence as I think she mulled over something. I broke the silence and her mulling. “The real awkwardness of playing

Romeo was opposite to me chosen to play Juliet was a girl named Debra who took it upon herself to do a deep and meaningful character study. She really got into her role.”

I knew that Penny wasn’t really listening to me at that moment. She was very far away in her thoughts, pondering something. I think I knew what she was pondering, the other side of her predicament. The question wasn’t whether she did not want to be bullied to going to bed with her blackmailer. It was perhaps whether she was ready to have sex at all.

I stopped for a moment, then continued on with my story. “Debra had brown colored hair that she had dyed blonde. She left her eye brows their original color. I later found out she was not a natural blonde.

“I guess it wasn’t fair to Debra but I had a crush on someone else.” The mention of a crush brought Penny halfway back to me. Penny sort of half-looked at me, because she was still somewhere else with her thoughts.

“It was just that my crush was for Olivia Hussey, the girl who played Juliet in the 1968 Zeffirelli Film! Honestly, what prepubescent boy would not fall in love with Olivia Hussey, especially after seeing her eyes and listening to her voice, and catching a glimpse of her breasts.”

The word breasts returned Penny to the here and now. “Her breasts ... were they allowed to show that on television?”

“Actually, in the bedroom scene you can see her breasts for a split-second but not much more. You could see Romeo’s backside too.”

“The girls must have liked that.”

“I guess so. Frankly, stacked up against Olivia Hussey, Debra did not have a chance and I did not have the courage, nor the heart, to tell her the real reason why.”

“Was your Juliet pretty?”

“I guess so.”

“Did she have breasts like Olivia Hussey?” Penny was more than just curious about this.

“Debra had breasts, both large like grapefruits, in fact one larger than the other.”

“You saw her breasts?”

I nodded. “And she also had no hips, and well, apart from her eye brows there was another affirmation that she was not a natural blonde.”

“You saw everything!”

“Be patient. Let me tell you the rest of the story.” I nodded. A few days before our afternoon school performance our teacher had us sit through a matinee screening of Zeffirelli’s 1968 Film Romeo and Juliet, with a few moments censored away.”

“How it was censored?”

“The nuns were rather practical. The film was being projected using an old style projector and at the bed room scene where Romeo and Juliet consummate their nuptials the nun simply held a book in front of the lenses to keep our little innocent minds from being corrupted by Romeo’s back side and Juliet’s breasts.”

Penny giggled.

“Ah, but it gets better. In our rehearsals Juliet had been up on the balcony and I had stayed with my feet firmly planted to the ground. This had brought me much solace. But ...”

“But what?”

“But the teacher the day of our performance insisted that if I were to climb the balcony then the two of us, Juliet and her Romeo, could be cheek to cheek for the famous balcony scene. It would be more realistic she insisted.”

“Oh ...”

“That day I did not have light amorous wings and it was a bit of a climb to get the ten feet up to the balcony, and to Juliet. Although the school had had the balcony for many years no fool had ever tried climbing up to the theatre balcony before, and I imagine no one has since my scene there at the school.”

“No!”

“I don’t know how I made it up and I tried to not botch my words. Things started to unravel when we got to my words ...” I acted out the role for her, word for word and gesture for gesture.

O, wilt thou leave me so unsatisfied?

“Then Debra smiled and tugged at a ribbon that had held together the bodice on her costume and well out she nearly popped. With a smirk she said her words ...”

What satisfaction canst thou have to-night?

“I tried to look away but my heart started to pound and my footing started to topple ... I struggled with my words ...”

The exchange of thy love's faithful vow for mine.

“Debra leaned forward, and both her breasts spilled out, one bigger than the other, and said her words ...”

*I gave thee mine before thou didst request it:
And yet I would it were to give again.*

“I knew I was slipping ... I looked back at the audience then at her, then down to the ground below. Without looking up at her I bravely continued on ...”

Wouldst thou withdraw it? for what purpose ... ?

“I had missed a word at the end of that sentence ... Debra whispered the word *love* ... I looked up at her. Debra’s eyes glittered as she said this.”

“I looked at her for a second thinking she had forgotten her next words. She had now spilled completely out of her bodice.”

*But to be frank, and give it thee again.
And yet I wish but for the thing I have:
My bounty is as boundless as the sea,*

“As she said bounty she looked down at her breasts and my eyes followed hers.”

My love as deep;

“Our eyes met and the warmth her eyes exuded flooded my heart and soul. Her voice became deep and lusty ... she wasn’t helping me. I was quickly losing my grip.”

the more I give to thee,

“She had inched herself forward until our lips were mere millimeters apart. Now she was whispering. I very much doubt that anyone other than I could hear what she was now saying.”

The more I have,

“She closed her eyes. At that instant I knew she was going to kiss me.”

for both are infinite.

“And so I let her ... and so she did. It was a warm and priceless kiss. There was not pretense to it. It was real, it was wonderful.”

Penny had been listening rapt in her attention. “So what did you do?”

“And so her Romeo climbed up onto her balcony to amorously embrace his Juliet. There was a tremendous roar from the audience that all but overpowered the futile efforts of our teacher to get us back onto our queues. We didn’t care.”

Penny was clapping and giggling.

“Beyond the edge of the balcony we were all alone. Debra let the rest of her bodice drop and well it wasn’t a bodice at all but a beautiful night dress. She had her back to the audience and they could see that her costume had dropped.”

Penny went silent.

“Then and only then did I peek down at Debra’s night dress at her feet and also saw that she was not a natural blonde.”

Penny took my hand. Then she tried to put my hand down the front of her pants. I understood what she wanted, but caught my thumb on her pant edge. My fingers were just glazing her intimacy.

“Please ...” she pleaded with me. I looked up into her face. It glowed, soft and bright. The moment felt so delicious.

I looked around, and spied a trail into the woods. “Not here! Let us go somewhere more private.” She leaped off my lap and took my hand, and we walked across the street and away from the people milling in the flower garden. We found the clearing in the woods and started to walk down a narrow path through a grove of deciduous trees. She walked silently and majestically until we found a little clearing with sunlight streaming down from above.

She then leaned back against a tree and I kissed her gently on the lips. Again she took my hand and wanted to guide it down the front of her pants. Instead I kneeled before her and undid the front of her Daisy Dukes and guided them off her hips. She had a wonderful tuff of blonde hair, her Delta of Venus, and a flushness to her second sets of lips. The best of her was inviting. Her fragrance was heady and mixed with the damp and moist smells of our surroundings. I really wanted to kiss her but I knew that I

shouldn't. Penny was looking down at me. She spread apart her legs. She was now so near, yet so far.

Just at the base of the tree was a wild daisy. I plucked the daisy and began to run it ever so slowly back and forth up her soft thighs. I could see her legs weaken and her knees begin to wobble. Penny placed her hands on my head and tried to hold herself steady. I blew on her fancy, separating the blonde tuffs and revealing her pleasure, her centre, her femininity. I tickled it with the daisy, one flower teasing another one. I could see her labia quiver with every caress. The quiver invited me to kiss her second pair of lips, but again I didn't. I had other ideas.

"You are driving me crazy," she whimpered.

"That's the idea." I kissed one thigh, then the other. She nearly swooned there and then. I ran my tongue up one of her thighs, tickling her. Then I slowly stood up.

Her eyes grew big, and saucy too. "What are you doing?" She looked down at her naked self. "Please don't stop."

I took my finger and lifted her chin and peered deep into her eyes. "Penelope ... close your eyes." She closed her eyes. I leaned close to her and whispered into her ear. "I want YOU to tickle your fancy" I emphasized the word You and took her ever so gently in my arms. "...while I hold you close."

She gulped and smiled, and with her right hand started to please herself between her legs. With her other hand she began to caress her breasts. Her breathing got deeper and deeper and in just a few seconds a splotch, splotch sound was all that could be heard among the quiet swish of the wind through the tops of the trees, as she gushed from her own passion.

And all the time she was doing this I held her close to me. Her breathing had become shallow and rapid. She had lifted her blouse and so her breasts were now there in the light of day. She tickled the softness of them and they responded to her touch. The breasts of a young woman have a remarkable shape to them, especially around the nipples. It is hard to describe, but you would understand if you saw them. Her breasts were beautiful, and they were perfect.

The blouse was getting in her way and so Penny tossed it off herself. If Botticelli, the Renaissance painter, had been there he would have found his Venus to make immortal in a painting, perhaps as Diana the huntress. Even today when I close my eyes and remember this moment I have shivers down my spine.

Penelope caressed herself slowly at first and then with an ever growing urgency. In a minute or so she began to sway. I swayed with her to steady her. She obviously knew how to please herself. I looked down at her, past her petite breasts, past her belly button, and past that wonderful ridge that defines the space between the legs of a woman. In a man that space would be crowded with soft gangly tissue. In a woman it is stark and streamline, a

wonder of precise and beautiful design. God definitely won an award for the creation of woman!

How Penny was pleasing herself was mesmerizing. Her hand was petting herself like a girl might pet a cat. She opened her hand, moved it down and set it against her bare flesh. Then she brought her hand slowly upwards, her fingers following the ridges of her sex. At the top of her stroke she lifted all but one finger, her middle finger, which caressed that soft prominence that poked up from within her blonde tuft of pubic hair. Then she tickled her hair with the other fingers in her hand. I could see goose bumps all over her body.

Penny had a rhythm to her caress, which was slow and deliberate. At the bottom of her stroke I noticed that she did not push her fingers into herself as I have seen some girls do with a vengeance when they tickled their fancy. For Penny that barrier to an inner passion was still there, *intacta*, as Latin would describe it.

I look up at Penny's face. It was a bright crimson. It almost glowed infrared in the afternoon sun. Then, after perhaps four or five minutes slowly and majestically Penny arched her back and began to tremble. She was coming close to her crisis.

I stroked her face and she opened her eyes. Seeing me made her more passionate. Penny started to whimper. I placed a finger gently over her lips. "Shhh ... " I whispered into her ear, "someone will hear you."

I took my other hand and placed the back of it on her stomach just above her delta of Venus. I could feel the animal warmth of her. I could almost feel her uterus dance. Then her legs drew together and her thighs tightened and I knew her urgency was near at hand.

So I kissed her bringing my lips tightly against hers. Once again she swayed her legs back and forth. With her *Daisy Dukes* down around her ankles and me being the perfect second to her pleasure, Penelope climaxed.

Her entire body spasmed. I had never seen such ecstasy in a woman. I could swear the tree we were pressed up against rippled in unison. And she gushed down the inside of her legs as if she had broken her water and was about to give birth to new born life. As she came she moaned a deep guttural moan which was so poignant to the moment that shivers ran down my spine.

Her orgasm shook her four or maybe five times in the space of several minutes. Then there was stillness and silence and all we could hear was the swish of the wind through the top of the trees, and beyond that the sound of traffic on the causeway to the bridge.

After a good minute I broke the silence. "How do you feel?" I whispered to her.

"Delicious ..."

She slurred her words as if she was inebriated.

I was so happy for her. Penny was still pure and innocent, but now more worldly. We had shared intimacy without having sex. It was also then that I realized her cell phone was long silent. That crisis had passed as well.

I looked down at her long legs, and her bare vulnerability. “You’re all wet.”

“I know ... I am sorry.”

“Don’t be sorry. That was incredible. Where’s the handkerchief.”

“In my bag,” she could barely announce her words. “... you get it out.” I bent down and opened her bag and took out the handkerchief. I used it to wipe up her passion that was still streaming down her long legs. Even her flip-flops were drenched.

As I dried her, a quivering little echo went down her limbs. To keep from falling over in her state Penny had to again hold herself up but pressing her hands against the top of my head. I tried to dry her, the best I could, but it was almost a futile gesture. I had to wring the small piece of white cotton cloth and start again.

I did not try to be too intimate with her. Instead I gave her the small piece of soft cotton and she did that herself. I watched with some amazement. She did this ever so carefully starting from within and moving to without. When she had finished she handed the handkerchief back to me. I wrung it a second time. Folded it and then put it in my jacket pocket.

After this tenderness she closed her eyes and for a few minutes we existed in a timeless stillness. The sun streamed down across her. The wind swished through the trees, and the traffic beetled on in the distance. Penny stood on one leg, with the other bent at the knee. She swung her free leg slowly as if in a trance. I looked up at her and admired her unabashed beauty. She was unashamed and majestic.

But what was I to do next? We had been intimate, but we had not had sex. It was then that I remembered her pink panties in my pocket. She was a million miles away and so I took them out. One at a time I lifted her feet and slipped her legs into them. Then I brought her panties up to her hips, passing the soft silk fabric ever so gently over her femininity. Her little prominence was still there and was tickled by the pink softness of the fabric. Penny shuddered.

Then I slowly brought her *Daisy Dukes* up to her hips as well. I carefully zipped them up and did the brass button as well. I picked her blouse off the ground, dusted some dead leaves off of it and then one arm at the time put her back into form. If I had been aroused by her intimacy, I was ready to pop just putting her back into her clothes. It is a strange thing how erotic putting clothes onto a woman can be, compared to helping her out of them.

As I did all this for her Penny had kept her eyes closed, languishing against the giant deciduous tree that was holding her up. . She had the most remarkable expression on her face. It was the look of perfect calmness and happiness.

I remembered we had bought something to drink. I took it out of her bag and opened the bottle of mineral water. “Here.” She opened her eyes but didn’t really seem to be there. I pressed the bottle in her hand and she automatically brought it up to her mouth. She poured a bit too much into her mouth and it trickled down her chin and onto her blouse, but she did not seem to mind. Then she handed the bottle back to me and closed her eyes again. I took a swig, put the lid back on the bottle and put it back into her hang bag.

“Time for us to go Penelope,” I said and stood there beside her. But Penny was a million miles away. She slowly opened her eyes and looked about. Then she offered me her hand, which was now quit warm and twice as soft as before, and we began to walk back the way we came with me leading the way.

After a few steps she tugged at my hand and we stopped. “Will you be my boy friend?” she said.

I shook my head.

“Why not?” She was surprised I said no!

She shouldn’t have been. “I am too old to be your boy friend.”

She stared at me perplexed. “Don’t you like me?”

“You are so beautiful and so lucky.” There I had said it. “In love it is not only a question of liking.”

“Love?” She said the word with a tickle in her voice.

I kissed her on the forehead. “Of course I love you, but we are at different points in our lives.”

“Different points?”

“Yes different points.” She drew herself close to me wrapping her arms around me. “But I will be as much of a friend as you would want me to be.”

She looked up at me and whispered “why did you ask me to tickle my fancy? Why didn’t you just ... you know.”

“I am just not that kind of a man! Our intimacy wasn’t about me, but about you.”

When I said this I could see the rush of adrenaline through her body. I could feel that her body was again on fire. She leaned forward and kissed me.

“Besides I didn’t want to take something from you that you might later regret.”

“Something?”

“Something which once taken is gone forever.”

“You mean my virginity.”

I nodded.

She smiled. “But what if I want to ...”

“That’s not what a good friend would do ...” I stopped to let her decide whether she wanted to speak next. She stayed silent.

“The pleasure wasn’t about me, Penelope, it was about you. What you wanted was a release from the stress you felt. Do you feel better now?”

“Yes I do. Thank you.” Her words were soft and genuine.

I smiled to her warmly. “Our few minutes of intimacy together did bring you pleasure didn’t it?”

Penny nodded.

“And you are still *virgo intacta*.”

“A virgin?”

I nodded. “Yes, you are still what you were an hour ago.” We got to the end of the path and were once again in the clearing. I continued. “Isn’t it

one thing to tickle one's fancy by oneself, but another thing altogether to do so in the presence of the other sex.”

“Yes, it felt so good!”

“You will never have such pleasure from a man, unless you are truly in love with him and he is truly in love with you. Sex is over-rated. But love isn't.”

She exhaled an emotional sigh and leaned her head against my shoulder. I think she understood. I had brought her happiness to push away the dark games that were being played out in her life and the dark secrets that lay hidden away in her heart. After a pause of a few seconds I continued, “intimacy and pleasure is what good friends share with each other. I would rather share an intimate pleasure with you ... than have sex ...”

“There's a difference?”

“In sex, men and women see the world too differently. Believe me when I say that there is more to sex than you can ever imagine.”

“Really?”

“But why be in such a big hurry. If you have sex, life become too complicated! Enjoy your life while it is still uncomplicated.”

She just stood staring at me, trapped perhaps by her own uncertainty. Then she asked me “what was the hard way?”

“What ... “ I was caught off guard.

“The hard way ... if the easy way hadn’t worked?”

“Oh ... I would have let you take a picture of you tugging on my fancy and then you send it to him, and well, you could say it is his fancy you were tugging on, and you would send that to all his friends!”

Penny started to giggle and scrambled to find her cell phone in her hand bag.

I stopped her hand. “Don’t bother ... you won’t need it.”

“That would have been fun!” She cocked her head as she said this.

“Yes, I guess it would have been.” I looked away as I said this. Then I turned back to face her. “Let me walk you to the bus stop.”

She didn’t say anything but just wrapped her arm around mine, leaned her head against my shoulder and we walked together silently. I respected her silence, for I knew that my words could not do justice to the depths of Penelope’s feelings.

As we walked out of Stanley Park above the skyline of the city I spied the pale shell of a waxing moon effaced on a bright and crisp blue sky. The

moon would grow into its fullness in a few short days. I looked down at her and wondered where she would be and what she would be doing when the moon was full. Would she still be the same person? I knew that she was different now than she was just the hour or so ago when we both ventured into the park.

Pensively we walked the two blocks to the entrance of the park, and then crossed the street. Silently we waited at the bus stop, at the end of a queue of five or six talkative tourists.

Penelope looked up at me just as the bus arrived at the curb. “I want to see you again,” her eyes beseeched me.

“Yes, let’s ... text me, I never answer my calls,” I said to her.

She reached up and wrapped her arms around my neck, pulling me closer. She gave me a final kiss on the mouth, tickling my lips with her’s. Then she got on the bus and paid her fare. She was the last person to get on, but fittingly the seat behind the driver was free and so she took it, sitting as a prim and proper young woman might, looking back down at me. The door hissed shut. Penny timidly waved at me and I waved back, smiling at her.

Behind my smile though was doubt, doubt we would ever see each other again and doubt she would truly understand that we were at different places in our lives. Inside I felt sad, that immense pit of sadness one tumbles into after being atop some great mountain of happiness.

As the bus pulled away I remembered something I had read many years ago about two people who were at different places in their lives. It was from D.H. Lawrence's book *The Rainbow*. The words flooded my psyche:

They had had their hour, and should it chime again, they were ready for it. Ready to renew the game at the point where it was left off, on the edge of the outer darkness, when the secrets within women are game for the man, hinted doggedly, when the secrets of the woman are the man's adventure, and they both give themselves to the adventure.

I wondered as the bus drive away. I wondered about our hour together in the park. Had I done the right thing, being a mere second to her pleasure? Would such intimacy ever chime for her again? Perhaps, only if she found her true love.

I knew for certain, though, that our walk in the park had been her intimate pleasure, and because of it, Penelope's predicament had reached a resolution.

Do You Ever Have the Urge to Sail the North Atlantic?

Like almost everyone, my heritage is a rich mix of different cultures, one of which is Scottish. I have read a little of the history of Scotland and the Scandinavian countries and realize that some of their riches history predates the Elizabethan era.

Every so often I happen upon someone who has a rather distinct mix of hair colour, visage and eye color that begs me to ask whether they know where their hair colour comes from – red head, strawberry blonde or blonde. This is a question that more times than not is answered with a *‘well ... my mother has this hair colour’* or something along those lines. So would begin an interesting conversation.

I then inquire whether they have European, Irish or Scottish Heritage. If they answer it is a European Heritage, it is usually from the Scandinavian region, or somewhere along the coast of the English Channel, such as Normandy or Brittany, or sometimes near some major inland river. Many more times than European heritage, the answer would be *‘I have Irish’* or *‘I have Scottish’* ancestry.

I then smile and say, *‘well ... odds are ... you are related to some famous Viking like Erik the Red or Leif Eriksson.’* By this point the person is all ears.

I would go on to tell them the saga of Eric the Red who settled on Greenland, and his son Leif Eriksson (the son of Erik) who sailed as far as

Vinland around the year 1,000 (now known as Newfoundland). I would remind them of their voyages of exploration across the North Atlantic and along the major inland rivers of Northern Europe, and how the Vikings were famous for their raids all along the English Channel and what is now known as the United Kingdom.

Then I would recount the story of an emissary being sent one spring in the 11th century by one of the Kings of Normandy to a Viking raiding party with the offer that *‘if they stopped coming each spring to rape, pillage and lay plunder to the countryside the King would grant you the right to land and settlement.’*

The offer was accepted. Soon red headed, strawberry blonde and blonde hair children started to appear all over the coast of the English Channel, and what we now call Ireland and Scotland. *‘This may be where you hair colour comes from,’* I would say.

Then I would have some fun and ask the person I am chatting with *‘do you ever have the urge to sail the North Atlantic in a long boat?’* Sometimes they admit they like everything about the sea, or enjoy sailing, but rarely do they say they are afraid of the sea.

It fascinates them to realize how a once great Viking empire stretched right across the Atlantic and much of Europe, as far as Russia, and wherever we find a certain hair colour.

A Sinful Pleasure

I know it is a sinful pleasure. But it has become something of an addiction for me. I need to do it every day; at least once in the morning and once again at night. I take my time and enjoy it to its fullest. You see ... I can't seem to stop doing it!

Perhaps it may become an affliction, drawing me down into my inescapable abyss. One day I might just decide to enjoy my sinful pleasure and nothing else. I don't know. Now that I have started, I just can't seem to stop. It feels so good. Maybe if I go blind?

It's a drug of sorts but not in its reality – no it is not listed in the *Pharmacopeia*. Although, perhaps I think it should be, but then again endorphins are not listed there are they? And boy do the endorphins flow when I am enjoying my sinful pleasure!

I can't seem to stop now that I have started in earnest. Oh, I have already said that haven't I? I do it where ever I can; in the bath; when I am alone in bed, which is now quite often. I sometimes try to do it in the back seat of a bus, but only if there is enough seclusion and only in the light of day. Then there is that corner table at the bistro. A few times I have been told to gather up my things and leave a bistro ... when my coffee cup sat empty long enough. I even do it in the library, but that's to be expected.

As I partake in my sinful pleasure do I really care what other people think? Reluctantly I do. You see I don't want to be seen doing it. I just want to be

left alone with my pleasures. I don't really want anyone to come sit with me and interrupt me. Although some have tried. It's just not the same with someone sitting there intruding.

Why should I share my pleasure with anyone? It is, after all, my sinful pleasure. And not everyone would want to bear witness to it, or even try to understand. God forbid if they wanted to join in! That would be too awkward even for me.

Sometimes it leaves my limbs aching. Sometimes my heart races – it depends on how good it was. If it is really, really good it sure gets the old cardiovascular system going full bore. If it is not, then it's a bad day, and the blood runs slow or sluggish. Perhaps its just how it comes to its finality. The climb to a plateau is hardly noticed if the conclusion is good. If the finale is not, well it wasn't worth the climb. It has to spout out, like fine champagne with the cork just pulled.

I tell you about it because, while it is a sinful pleasure, I want you to empathize. It is good for the body, as much as the mind. In our day and age of coldness and antipathy, anything that gets the warm blood flowing must be good, right? And if afterwards your mind is clearer, who needs the *Pernod* then – although *Pernod* is a good chaser. It does enhance the senses, especially if the climb is long and arduous and the finale anything but magnificent.

I don't like doing it on an empty stomach, nor on a full stomach, but somewhere in between. Sometimes I have a snack and then get to it. And

music, while, classical music is the best, especially when you do it in the bath. There was the time my girl friend and I did it together in a salt water bath – now that was lush! Perhaps that is the best of sinful pleasures!

Sometimes I do it slowly, savoring every second of bliss. And other times, it's just too rough for me and I move my fingers quickly. Sometimes there is a softness to it, and sometimes it is very hard to do, and the fingers move slowly.

What was it that Poe once said of the real and the unreal? *The realities of the world affected me as visions, and as visions only, while the wild ideas of the lands of dreams became, in turn, not the material of my every-day existence, but in very deed that existence utterly and solely in itself.*

I know girls do it too, perhaps more so than boys, and unquestionably more so than they might generously admit. It's in their nature. But heh, what's wrong with that? *Vie la difference!*

Girls are so damned lucky, for they experience their sinful pleasure much earlier and with greater passion than boys. Undoubtedly, they experience it with greater abandon. Compared to these flighty birds, we boys are just crows, left to gather and squawk.

Life is just not just, nor evenhanded. In the world of the sinful pleasures, we boys are just devils ... compared to the angels.

We are reminded of this in a story by Poe, by words writ by someone other than he ... *“Man doth not yield himself to the angels, nor unto death utterly, save only through the weakness of his feeble will.”*

Well, my sinful pleasure of this morning comes to a finale. Here I am laying back in the bath. The water has grown quite cold. But I did not notice this in my frenzy. I myself am quite hot. Oh, please turn around I am bare naked.

I set the book down and stand, being careful not to drip all over *Ligeia*, by Edgar Allan Poe. Last night it was a short story by Ernest Hemingway. When I get home this evening, before I even make myself dinner, I will be right back here with a sinful pleasure written by Anais Nin and a sniff of *Pernod*.

You're welcome to join me in the bath. Just bring your own book. Ah life!

